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Blind Barbara's Secret;

OR,

THE HISTORY OF A HEART.

BY MARY GRACE HALPINE,

AUTHOR OF "THE MISSING BRIDEGROOM," "THE HUSBAND OF TWO WIVES," "WHO WAS GUILTY?" "ELSIE'S PRISONER," "WHOSE WIFE WAS SHE?" ETC., ETC., ETC

CHAPTER I.

THE BLIND WOMAN.

IRVA SUTTON made a sweet picture as she stood peering through the open window, the roses that clambered over it outvied by the rich bloom upon cheek and lip.

The woman sitting inside, attracted by th

rustling foliage, turned her sightless eyes up to the casement.

Irva stood motionless; her eyes sparkling and her mouth dimpling at the thought of the happy surprise she was going to give.

Just then the canary in the cage that swung from the rustic porch, suddenly spying her, trilled forth a note of welcome that made the air vocal with melody.

Catching the inspiration, Irva threw back her head, sending back a glad refrain that the little fellow vainly swelled its little throat to rival.

Uttering an exclamation of joy, the woman within arose and turned toward the door, just as the young girl entered, who gave her an affectionate embrace.

"Dear child! I was not looking to see you to-day."

Irva turned a look of surprise upon the speaker.

"Why shouldn't I come to-day as well as any other?"

"One of the neighbors was telling me that Mrs. Sutton's nephew had come, a fine, stylish-looking gentleman."

"He might be twice as fine and stylish-looking, and he would not keep me from coming to see my dear old nurse."

The woman smiled and then looked thoughtful.

"What is this man's name?"

"Sully."

"I didn't know that she had a nephew by that name."

"Nor I, until the day before he came. Mamma never tells me anything."

"Did she never tell you anything about yourself?"

"About myself? No. What would she have to tell?"

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen, and past," responded Irva, with a pretty little assumption of girlish dignity, quite thrown away, however, upon the old blind woman, who swaying herself backward and for-



IRVA OBEYED, DRAWING A SMALL ROUND TABLE TO THE WINDOW, ON WHICH LAY THE SACRED VOLUME.

ward seemed to be entirely absorbed in her own thoughts and feelings, which were evidently not of a very pleasant nature.

"She has broken her promise!" she muttered; "why should I keep mine?"

Irva surveyed her with a look of surprise.

Taking a low seat at her feet, she slipped her hand into the wrinkled fingers that were clasped over the knee.

"What is the matter, Barby? You look and talk so strangely!"

Barby laid her hand upon the head of the speaker, smoothing softly the rippling hair from the forehead.

"My pretty nursling! I never thought you were so old. It seems such a little time since I held you in my arms! It is fourteen years since I looked upon your face. I wonder if it is as fair and sweet and winsome as it was then!"

Irva pressed her lips to the hand that Barby passed slowly over her features, as if to gain some palpable answer to her questions.

"Dear nurse! you were always so good to me!"

"I meant to be; but I was deceived. I have been deceived twice. She said she would tell you."

Irva began to think that the old woman's wits were wandering.

"Tell me what, Barby?"

"It is a secret; but it shall be one no longer, if she refuses to keep her promise. Take this key, and go to the under drawer of my bureau. In the right hand corner you will find a small ebony box. Bring it to me."

Wondering not a little at Barby's strange words and manner Irva obeyed.

Taking a smaller key from her bosom, Barby unlocked it, using her hands as swiftly and deftly as though in full possession of all her senses. At the bottom of the box was a small gold locket.

Taking it up, Barby handed it to Irva.

"Open it."

Irva touched the spring, uttering a cry of admiration as she saw the lovely face that looked out upon her; in whose smiling eyes and lips there was something strangely familiar.

"Did you ever see that face before?"

"No. And yet—"

Irva paused, unable to put into words the feelings which filled her heart as she looked at it.

"You see something like it when you look into your mirror?"

The young girl blushed and smiled. That radiantly lovely face was like her own, vain as it seemed to acknowledge it.

"Whose picture is it?"

"Your mother's."

Irva stared at the speaker for a moment in silence.

"Mamma's! Impossible! It isn't the least bit like—"

"Mrs. Sutton? No; but Mrs. Sutton is not your mother!"

Irva looked almost aghast at the speaker; but there was nothing in that pale, composed face to confirm the sudden suspicions that crossed her mind.

Many things flashed upon her recollection—things she had never been able to account for.

She looked again upon that sweet face.

The eyes seemed to wear another and a tenderer expression, and she felt her own moisten as she gazed.

"Where is she?"

"In heaven, I hope."

Irva's eyes filled with tears.

"Dead!—my beautiful mother! Who was she?"

"That I cannot tell you—just now."

The tearful eyes emitted an impatient flash, which gave them quite another expression.

"Why cannot you tell me? You must!"

Then, as she looked upon the pale face, whose sightless eyes were lifted upward, as if imploring help from some invisible source, the eyes softened.

With a sudden movement she laid her smooth cheek softly against the wrinkled one of her companion.

"Dear nurse! you surely have not told me this, to leave me in the dark now?"

Barby stretched out her arm with an energy and determination entirely at variance with her usually quiet and placid manner.

"No, no! you shall be kept in the dark no longer! I have said it; and I will keep my word. But it will be better that *she* tell you, if she will—better for us both. If she will not, then I must. Perhaps she has forgotten; I will give her time to remember. Be patient, my child: it will be only a few days, at the longest."

Irva looked far from satisfied.

"Did you know my mother?"

"Did I know her?—my sweet little Alice! She lay, an infant, upon my bosom; she died in my arms! She was only two years older than you now are; but she died broken-hearted—glad to hide her sorrows in the grave!"

The tones in which these words were spoken were broken, almost inarticulate.

"My father—who was he?"

The bowed head was suddenly raised, while a hard, almost bitter look came into the face.

"You must ask Mrs. Sutton that. Say that I bid you ask it. Say to her, also, that I, Barbara Worth, charge her to redeem the promise she made me the day you were born. That though I am blind and helpless, *God lives!*"

Awed by the solemnity of these words, Irva was silent, and in a few moments Barby resumed, in quite another tone:

"Now bring hither the Good Book, darling, and read to me."

Irva obeyed, drawing a small round table to the window on which lay the sacred volume, which was such an inexhaustible source of strength and comfort to Barby.

And in listening to the beautiful words of "the sweet singer of Israel," the look of pain and sorrow vanished from the pale face, giving place to an expression of peace and serenity that sunk deep into Irva's heart as she closed the volume.

Raising her sightless eyes upward, Barby murmured:

"*The ungodly shall fall into the pit that they dig for the innocent.*"

CHAPTER II.

A STARTLING QUESTION.

IN an upper room of a house, about twenty miles from New York, a woman sat.

How old, how fair to look upon, her face had once been, were not an easy thing to say now. But she was younger than she looked, and had once been noted for a wild, weird beauty, no trace of which could be seen now save in the eyes, which gleamed with a strange, unnatural brilliancy.

Pride, envy, hate, all the fierce passions that make the human heart a hell, had scarred and lined the face, scattering untimely frost among the disordered locks that fell around the shoulders.

She was not alone.

Her companion was a man some years younger, whose face would have been handsome but for the impress of dissipation and excess stamped so legibly upon every feature.

The man was the first to speak.

"I have seen a great many beautiful women, cousin; but never did I see one so fair and sweet as this daughter of yours—if she is your daughter?"

The woman met unflinchingly the sharp eyes turned so suddenly upon her.

"What makes you think Irva is not my child?"

"I have various reasons. One of these is that your husband died all of twenty years ago, and this girl does not look more than sixteen."

A faint smile touched the thin, compressed lips.

"Looks are very deceptive; people often seem to be younger and older than they are. But you said you had more reasons than one; pray go on."

"When I visited you, some eight or ten years ago, I neither saw nor heard anything of this daughter."

"That is easily accounted for. Irva was brought up out of my house, by a nurse to whom she is strongly attached, and who is a good deal fonder of her than I am."

"That might be," said the other, significantly, "and the woman not over fond of her, either."

"Which is another argument for the establishment of your theory, I suppose. I am not a woman given to sentiment, and so make no pretense of being fond of the girl. In my opinion girls are expensive and troublesome things, and Irva is no exception to the general rule. To tell the truth, I shall be glad when she is off my hands. It strikes me that you take a great deal of interest in her?"

Here the speaker looked keenly into the eyes of her companion.

"I do; I think I never looked upon a face more rarely beautiful."

"Her beauty, or whether she is my child or no, is nothing to you. Let us proceed to business. You have been over the place; what do you think of my offer?"

"I think it worth all you ask for it," was the slow and cautious reply.

"It is worth nearly double, Stephen, as you well know."

"Why do you sell it at such a sacrifice?"

"For two reasons. First, because I want to raise some money; second, because I have decided to leave this part of the country—though this is something that I don't want mentioned to any one, just now. You can have the place, just as it stands, for what I told you, or else a liberal commission for selling it for me. For reasons of my own, there must be no advertisement of it in my name."

Stephen looked curiously at the speaker.

"Why?"

"That is my business."

Stephen was silent for some moments. When he did speak, his low, soft voice contrasted strongly with the curt, sharp tones of his companion.

"Of course. Still, one cannot help wondering a little at your making so sudden and complete a change."

"People can wonder as much as they like; my reasons are perfectly satisfactory to me, and concern no one else. Now what do you say, will you take the place at the price, and on the conditions named?"

"Yes. I don't want it myself, but I think I can find a purchaser. Will pay you half down, and the remainder on its disposal. Will that be satisfactory?"

"Entirely so."

"I presume Miss Irva, your daughter"—there was a slight emphasis on the word italicised, clearly perceptible to Mrs. Sutton—"goes with you?"

"That is as it may be. My means are too straitened for me to be able to support her in idleness a great while longer. I have given her a good education, and intend that she shall earn her own living. But here she is. Not a word of this before her, mind!"

The opening door revealed the form of a young girl, not more than seventeen, whose bloom and beauty fully justified Stephen's enthusiastic description.

As her eyes fell upon the man, who had risen from his seat at her appearance, Irva paused hesitatingly upon the threshold.

"Come in, child. What are you waiting for?"

As Irva obeyed these sharply-spoken words, Sully took a step forward, with the evident intention of greeting her, but, without seeming to notice this, she hurried past him.

But it did not escape Mrs. Sutton's notice.

"Don't you see your cousin, Irva?"

Irva laid her hand with evident reluctance in the one extended toward her.

The man gazed admiringly into the partly-averted face, whose color deepened as she felt rather than saw that earnest gaze.

"Sweet cousin, you are looking so lovely this morning that I would very gladly take a cousin's privilege."

"No?" he added, as, drawing back, Irva made a quick, dissenting motion. "Then this."

The door closed after Sully, and Irva stood looking down thoughtfully upon the hand on which his lips had rested, a disturbed look upon the sweet, ingenuous face.

Mrs. Sutton regarded her curiously.

"You don't like your cousin?"

"No."

"Why?"

"That is what puzzles me. I don't know why."

"Of course you don't. How should you, when there is no reason at all? I am glad to see that Stephen is taking a deep interest in you. The time is coming when you will need just such a friend as he is disposed to be to you; and I want to see no more such silly, capricious conduct on your part."

"Where have you been all the morning?"

"At nurse Barby's, reading to her."

"Out of the Bible, I suppose?"

Irva turned her eyes upon the face, to whose bitter, sneering expression no words can do justice.

"Yes. There is no other book that nurse likes to hear so well. She says when I read to her out of that Book that she forgets that she is old and blind and helpless."

"Old Barby must be getting in her dotage, and you more of a simpleton than I thought you were to spend your time thus."

Irva was silent.

A sudden suspicion darted into Mrs. Sutton's mind.

"It strikes me that you and Barby are together a good deal lately?"

"I like to hear her talk. She talks beautifully. And then—I think she loves me."

"Don't I love you?"

Irva fixed her eyes, with a soft, penetrating look, upon the speaker's face.

"No."

"A mother ought, surely, to love her child."

"Are you my mother?"

If this was a strange question, its effect was still more startling.

Springing to her feet Mrs. Sutton seized the terrified girl by both shoulders.

"Girl," she cried, hoarsely, "what do you mean? Answer me," she added, pushing Irva against the wall, and holding her there.

As the frightened girl looked into those glaring eyes, she uttered a shriek of terror.

Sully was going past the open window. Leaping through into the room, he took the excited woman by the arm.

"Good heavens! Lucia, what does this mean? Have you gone mad?"

Apparently overcome by the violence of her feelings, Mrs. Sutton sunk into the nearest seat.

"It means that I have been betrayed," was her sullen response. "Leave me, both of you, I want to be alone."

CHAPTER III.

BLIND BARBARA'S VISITOR.

DURING the remainder of the day, Mrs. Sutton remained in her own room, alternately walking restlessly up and down it, or sitting motionless in the wide easy-chair beside the bed, her face buried in her hands.

Irva's question had evidently roused a tempest in her soul that was not easily subdued.

About dusk she rung for a strong cup of coffee; a favorite beverage with her, especially in emergencies like this.

"Send Miss Irva here," she said to the servant who removed the tray.

Irva lingered by the door, glancing furtively at Mrs. Sutton, as if in doubt as to whether it would be prudent to approach very near; but the calm, almost gentle expression upon her countenance reassured her.

"Come hither, Irva. Nay, you have no reason to fear me, child."

Irva took the seat to which she was pointed, which was where the light from the silver lamp, which swung from the ceiling, fell full upon the sweet, ingenuous face.

Mrs. Sutton surveyed it keenly for some moments, as though she would read her inmost soul.

"Barby has told you—what?"

Clearly and fearlessly the young voice rung out:

"She told me that you were not my mother."

A faint gleam broke into the eyes that were fixed so intently upon the speaker.

"What else?"

"She bid me ask you who my father was?"

There was a pause, during which Mrs. Sutton struggled visibly with all the memories that this question evoked. But there was no trace of it in the smooth, even voice.

"What else?"

"She charged you to remember your promise to her the day I was born."

"Did she tell you what this was?"

"No; she said that it would be better for you to tell me, if you would. That if you did not keep your promise, she would not keep hers."

Leaning back in her chair, Mrs. Sutton drew a long breath.

Matters were not as bad as she thought. Nothing of importance had been revealed as yet. If she acted promptly and decisively, the threatened danger to her plans might be averted.

"Poor Barby is right; I should have told you before," she said, with a half-sigh. "But it was not a pleasant thing to talk about, so I have kept deferring it. Tell her that I shall keep my promise. You shall know the secret of your birth; whether it will make you any happier is another thing. Go now. I am unable to bear any further excitement; but in a day or two, at the longest, you shall know all."

There was a disappointed look in Irva's eyes as she moved toward the door; but it changed to pity as they rested upon the face of the speaker, which was looking more worn and haggard than she had ever seen it before.

Suddenly a thought struck her. Pausing, with her hand on the door, she turned round.

"One thing I had forgotten."

"Well?"

That sharp tone was in curious contrast to the listless attitude.

"She bade me charge you to remember,

though she was blind and helpless, that God was just!"

Mrs. Sutton raised her hand with an impatient gesture.

"That will do. Go!"

"God!" she repeated in a scoffing tone, as she was left alone. "If I believed that there was any such being I should not dare to take the course that I must take if—"

"But I will not act hastily. I will see the old fool, and if she will listen to reason—if she won't, why—"

Uttering these disjointed sentences Mrs. Sutton moved restlessly up and down the room, occasionally pausing by the window and looking out into the night, whose shades were deepening fast.

After waiting until it was quite dark she put on a large mantle and close bonnet and stole out of the house by the back way.

Going down to the road she crossed it, striking into a narrow path which ran across an open field, and from thence into some woods, on the further edge of which stood Barby's cottage.

As she approached it the moon emerged from behind the clouds, not only bringing it distinctly into view, but revealing clearly the leaves and tendrils that clambered over it, glistening with dew and quivering in the breeze.

There was no light within—night and day were alike to poor Barby—but by the open window Mrs. Sutton could see the outlines of a figure swaying slowly backward and forward.

As cautious as was her approach the blind woman, whose hearing was rendered acute by her misfortune, detected it.

Rising from her seat, she stood in an attitude of listening by the door.

"Barby, it is I, Lucia Sutton. Open the door."

There was a moment's hesitation, and then the bolt was slipped back.

Pushing open the door, Mrs. Sutton seated herself with little ceremony in the chair that Barby had just vacated.

"Are you quite alone, Barby?"

"I am never alone."

Mrs. Sutton cast a startled glance around.

"Who is with you?"

The words of the Holy Book, which was Barby's study by night and day, were ever upon her lips.

"He who has promised to be with me ever, even to the end, the Defender of the widow and the fatherless."

Mrs. Sutton had a purpose to gain, so she checked the scoffing reply that arose to her lips.

Barby was the first to break the silence.

"It is a long time since I have had the honor of receiving madam under my poor roof."

Mrs. Sutton's voice was so soft and gentle that it hardly seemed like hers.

"I have not meant to neglect you, Barby. I have been very busy, and then—"

"You knew me to be blind and helpless—and therefore safe. But I have not lost my memory, as you will find. Irva gave you my message, I suppose. It is this that has brought you hither, in the night—which is no night to me. Nor yet to Him, whose eye is on you, and from whom, strive as you may, you cannot escape!"

"There is no need for you to assume this tone to me, Barby; as though I had ever wronged you, or was intending to do so. Yes, I got your message; and was very glad that you had the prudence and good sense to leave the matter to me."

"I have left the matter to you, only in this way, that if you will not tell Irva, what she should have known long ere this, I must! I will keep the promise I made you when I committed Irva to your guardianship, but you must keep yours."

"And so I will. That is, if you insist upon it. But—I thought that you loved Irva?"

"Love her? Strange as it may seem, her mother was not so near to my heart as she!"

"If you love her, as you say, how is it that you wish her to know what will only bring her shame and sorrow—a shame and sorrow which, as my child, she would never know."

"Your child? Lucia Sutton! you have never given her a child's place in your heart or home, nor have I been able to discover any indications that you had the slightest affection for her! You have secluded her from all society, keeping her in this out-of-the-way place, with no companionship but yourself and the creatures that surround you. It is my belief that you mean her ill!"

Mrs. Sutton was evidently not prepared for words like these.

"You talk wildly, Barby. What ill could I mean her?"

"How can I tell? Who can follow the windings of the scheming brain that was never yet idle? But this I know, in one thing, at least, you have deceived me."

"Deceived you, Barby?"

"Lied to me, then!—if the terms suit you better. *Irva's father is not dead!*"

Those sightless eyes could not see the blanched face, to which the moonbeams that fell over it gave an additional pallor; but the quick ear—quicken by her infirmity—caught the tremulous breath which came through the parted lips, whose convulsive workings she could not see, and well knew the fierce tempest of dismay and guilty fears that her words had called forth.

"Who—how do you know this?"

"No matter how; I do know it. And how do I know but what you have deceived me in other matters? How do I know that anything you told me was true? Alice, poor baby!—for she was little else—was like wax in your hands, and I did not know you as I do now. I sometimes think that the whole thing was planned, a falsehood, from beginning to end!"

No words can do justice to the expression in the eyes that were turned upon the face of the speaker.

"Are you mad, Barby, to bring against me such a charge as this?"

"No; but I think I have been, to take so much upon trust, as I did. To believe so much, with no evidence but your word, and the testimony of a woman who might be anything but what she professed to be. Outward blindness has brought me internal light; and as I have sat here alone—with the exception of this dear child—neglected and forgotten, thinking of the past, many things seem clear to me. There is a great wrong and mystery somewhere. Some evil is threatening my pretty nursling; though what it is, or from what quarter, I cannot say."

Mrs. Sutton had now recovered her usual coolness and self-possession, which were not easily disturbed.

There was no trace of the anger that still brooded in the eyes, in the smooth, even tones, as she said:

"You are letting your imagination run away with you, Barby. If it were not for your misfortunes, which naturally make you morbid and mistrustful, I should be seriously angry. Irva's father is dead to her; and if I allowed you to suppose him to be so, in reality, it was because I believed it better for you and all concerned. Why should you seek to cloud her young heart with the knowledge, that she not only has no right to the name she has, but no right to any?"

"I'm not so sure of that. There is a mystery here that only the truth will clear up. Now that she is a woman, Irva must know the secret of her birth; not only the name of her father, but who her mother was."

"Do you think it will avail her anything? Think you that the haughty blood of the Camerons will let him stoop to acknowledge her?"

"It matters not. He may disown her, if he will. But he shall know that she, who should have been his wife—if she was not—who believed herself to be such until within a week of her death, was the mother of his child, and that that child is living. It only remains to decide whether you will do this, or I."

"Of course, Barby, if you insist on Irva knowing this, it shall be done. I acknowledge your rights in the case, though you seem to think I have forgotten them. I thought, and still think it much more kind and wise that she should be kept in ignorance of the secret of her birth, but you think otherwise, and that is enough. All that I ask is that you will keep your promise, and let me tell her this."

"As I said before I will keep my promise if you will keep yours."

"I will keep it. Of course you have communicated with Irva's father; have you had any reply?"

A faint smile came to Mrs. Sutton's lip as she saw the disconcerted look in the face of her companion, who remained silent.

"Of course, with the feelings you entertain, I could have no possible objection to your doing so, Barby."

"I did write, or cause to have written, a letter to him about a month ago. I felt that the interests of Irva demanded it. I have had no reply as yet."

"Where did you direct it?"

"To his home in Maryland."

It was well for Mrs. Sutton that Barby did not see the exultant flash that broke from her eyes.

Rising, she drew her mantle around her.

"As I told you, he will never acknowledge or provide for her. If you knew him as well as I do, you would never have dreamed of such a thing. However, set your mind entirely at rest on one point; before another week, Irva shall know all you would have her know. Good-night."

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. SUTTON'S MIDNIGHT STUDIES.

MRS. SUTTON was an eager searcher into the mysteries of nature.

She had studied the science of medicine in her younger days, though simply from curiosity, with no design of putting it to any practical use.

A small laboratory opened out of her room, fitted up with every convenience, where she often spent hours, experimenting.

On one side were various herbs, drugs and chemicals, the other was lined with medical works, some of a very abstruse nature, and which bore the appearance of being the product of another age and country.

Among these were some left her by an old Italian physician, to whom she had done some favor. They were written in his own language, and very ancient.

She took one of these down, poring over it for nearly an hour.

Then lighting a spirit lamp under a retort, she began to take from the contents of various drawers, jars and vials, scrupulously weighing each in a pair of tiny scales, and every now and then consulting the book which lay open before her.

For some time her efforts were unsuccessful; several times she poured out the contents of the crucible and commenced anew. But her efforts did not relax, or her patience fail; with gleaming eyes and compressed lip she toiled on, with varying success, adding this and abstracting that, and pausing only to wipe the perspiration from her forehead.

The gray dawn was stealing through the shutters, when Mrs. Sutton again removed the crucible and held it to the light, a gleam of triumph in her eyes as she looked at its contents.

It contained nothing but a very fine powder of silvery whiteness, which diffused a faint, sickening odor as she bent over it.

It seemed to have some effect upon her, for going to the window she opened it, standing by it for some minutes.

When Mrs. Sutton left the window she saturated a silk handkerchief in strong alcohol, binding it tightly over her mouth and nostrils.

She then removed the powder from the crucible into a small metallic flask, whose stopple screwed on so as to make it air-tight.

This she deposited in a drawer in her desk, whose key she kept constantly about her, suspended on a small chain around her neck.

She then returned to the book she had studied so attentively; running her forefinger slowly along, from line to line, through a description of certain symptoms, to be expected from certain conditions, and which seemed to afford her peculiar satisfaction.

"DELIRIUM," she muttered—reading from the book—"followed by CONFUSION OF IDEAS, LOSS OF MEMORY, INCOHERENCE, PARTIAL IDIOSY, and—if necessary—DEATH!"

"It will not be necessary," she added, as returning the book to its place she left the laboratory; "if it does all else that it claims, it will be enough. And I will not incur more risks than is needful."

So saying, Mrs. Sutton threw herself, partially disrobed, upon a couch; falling into a deep, heavy slumber.

When Mrs. Sutton awoke, the sun was high in the heavens.

As she remembered what must be done and speedily, or lose what had become the ruling mainspring of her life, she sprang to her feet, plunging her head repeatedly into a basin of ice-cold water.

The effect of this could be readily seen, especially in the heavy, bloodshot eyes, which began to regain their usually keen, alert expression.

She then rung the bell, ordering breakfast—hot rolls and strong coffee—to be served in her own room.

As she was discussing these, her mind was busy concocting various plans, which, one after another, were rejected, as being impracticable or too dangerous.

Turning, in her perplexity, to the window, she saw Irva standing upon the piazza, outside, a broad-brimmed hat on her head and a small basket on her arm.

A sudden thought flashed upon her.

"Irva!"

Irva turned at the sound of that imperious voice.

"I want you to go to town, and see if you cannot match this. Stephen will drive you down!"

Irva glanced from the bit of shining silk held up to her to the basket on her arm.

"Won't to-morrow do as well? This is my birthday, and I was going to take tea with Barby. She always expects it, you know."

Mrs. Sutton neither knew nor cared, but she had an object in getting rid of Irva just then.

"No; Elsie cannot go on with my dress without it, and I can trust no one else to get the exact shade, which is not easy to find. You can take tea with Barby some other day. What have you in your basket?"

"A cake that the cook baked for me and a bottle of currant wine."

"That is well," responded Mrs. Sutton, with the bland smile that so seldom visited her face; "I am glad to find you so thoughtful of the comfort of your good, kind nurse. I will take charge of it; sending word to Barby that you will take tea with her to-morrow, which will suit her just as well."

There was nothing more to be said, as Irva very well knew. As gracious as was Mrs. Sutton's manner, her temper was too high and uncertain for her to venture upon any remonstrance as that lady coolly relieved her of her basket, putting it on her own dressing-table.

Stephen was no ways loth to any proposition that gave him the society of the young girl, whose beauty had inflamed his jaded fancy—heart he had none—and who was so shy of him that he found it difficult to approach her. So in a very short space of time, Irva found herself riding along the smooth highway in the low, easy phaeton, sitting beside the man for whom she had conceived an instinctive repugnance the first time she saw him. She had resented the familiarity of his manner and the privileges he seemed disposed to take on the ground of their assumed cousinship; but Stephen had taken another tack now. The quiet deference of his manner put her more at ease; and as she stole a look at him from beneath the long lashes her heart softened, and she began to study the face, which, being partly turned from her, she could do without being, as she supposed, observed.

Stephen let her watch him in silence for some moments, and then said:

"I hope Miss Irva's ride with me this morning is not what makes her look so sober?"

"I did not want to come."

Stephen bit his lip; he was not accustomed to have those of her sex that he tried to please so indifferent, if not averse to his society.

"That is not much of a compliment to me."

"I did not intend it as such."

Then noticing the annoyed look on her companion's face, she added:

"Nor did I mean any discourtesy. It is simply—the truth. Poor Barby will be so disappointed!"

"Who?"

"My nurse, Barby. She is blind. This is my birthday. I always take tea with her on this day, and she will be expecting me."

"You are very fond of your nurse?"

"And so I ought to be; she is the very best friend I have."

"With the exception of Mrs. Sutton, of course?"

"I except no one."

"Is not she your friend?"

"I have not said she was not."

Stephen was silent. There was a mingling of frankness and reserve, simplicity and good sense, in Irva that puzzled him, deepening the interest that her beauty had awakened in him.

But to return to Mrs. Sutton.

Standing upon the lawn until she saw the carriage disappear in the distance, she returned to her own room.

Raising the cover of the basket on her dressing-table, she examined its contents.

Upon a snowy napkin lay the dainty birthday-cake, frosted and ornamented by Irva's own hands, together with a bottle of wine, some oranges, nuts and confectionery.

A gleam of triumph shot from her eyes.

"Could anything happen more fortunately?" she muttered. "If there *was* a God, would he let the girl play into my hands thus, giving me the very opportunity I was seeking? There is no such Being; this life is all, and I will make the most of it!"

CHAPTER V.

THE SECRET CONFERENCE AND UNDERSTANDING.

We will return to Mrs. Sutton's room an hour later.

On a table is the covered basket, and beside it Mrs. Sutton.

On the other side near the door is a tall, spare woman, with high cheek-bones, thin, compressed lips, and a hard, cold expression in the pale-blue eyes.

Mrs. Sutton was engaged in counting some bank-bills which she had taken from her pocket-book, apparently paying no heed to the eager, expectant eyes that were watching her.

"As I was saying, Elsie," pursued Mrs. Sutton, carefully smoothing the last bill upon the pile at her right hand, "you have served me long and faithfully, and it has been on my mind for some time to give you some token of my appreciation of it. And there seems to be no more fitting time than the present."

"Not just yet," she added, as the woman took a step forward; "I want you to do a little something for me first, then you shall have it."

The woman's face changed perceptibly, and she cast a sharp, inquiring look at the speaker.

"Well?"

"You know Barbara Worth?"

"The blind woman at the edge of the forest?"

"Yes. I have carried things to her from Miss Irva."

"That is well. I want you to carry her something from Miss Irva now. This."

Elsie looked at the uncovered basket.

"Is that all?"

"No. I want you to say to her that Miss Irva sends it, with her love. That she had to go to town to-day, and will take tea with her to-morrow."

"Well?"

"I want you to say that Miss Irva sent a special request that she would drink her health out of this bottle of wine, and not to leave until you have made sure of her doing so."

For a moment the two eyed each other in silence.

Then Elsie spoke, glancing at the bottle, whose clear, ruby contents flashed brightly in the sunlight.

"What is it?"

"Don't you see what it is?—wine."

"What will it do?"

Mrs. Sutton was silent; evidently debating in her own mind how far she could safely take the questioner into her confidence.

The woman's lips closed grimly.

"Don't tell me if you don't want to. But you won't get me to slip my neck into a noose blindfolded, you may be certain of that!"

"Hush! Elsie; don't speak so loud!"

Opening the door, Mrs. Sutton looked cautiously into the entry, and then softly closing it, resumed her seat.

"I will be frank with you, Elsie; you have been so faithful and discreet in other matters that I believe I can trust you. Barbara Worth—Barby, as we call her—knows something that I want her to forget. This"—here she touched the bottle with her finger—"will make her forget it."

Elsie looked darkly at the speaker.

"The forgetfulness of the grave, I suppose?"

"Nothing of the sort. Do you think I would risk so much myself, or let you risk it? It will affect the mind only, and that only in a certain direction. There is no danger whatever. Do what I have told you, with the skill and adroitness that you can exercise, if you will, and you shall have this."

Elsie looked at the pile of bills on which the speaker's hand rested.

"How much?"

Mrs. Sutton held up a ten-dollar bill.

"Ten of these."

Elsie's eyes sparkled. Avarice was the ruling passion of her nature.

"I'll do it."

Barby sat by the open window, watching for the approach of that welcome and familiar step; occasionally parting the leaves of the vine that clambered over it, that she might catch the lightest footfall along the narrow woodpath by which she knew that Irva would come.

The room, always scrupulously neat and clean, presented quite a gala appearance from the flowers that adorned it, mostly roses of various hues and shades, and which made the air heavy with fragrance.

They not only filled the vases on the mantle, but looped up the muslin curtains, adorning the round table covered with snowy linen, on which were the remains of the old-fashioned china, that was Barby's especial delight and veneration. She handled each piece as though it were

gold, rubbing it with a napkin until it shone again.

Like most of the blind, her sense of feeling guided her so perfectly that her misfortune would not have been apparent to a stranger as she moved about, altering this and adjusting that with a deftness and nicety of touch truly marvelous.

"That will do, I think. Won't it, Tip?"

Tip was a large, sleek-looking cat that was lying on the threshold of the open door basking in the sun, to whom Barby talked a good deal, for the lack of any one else to talk to.

Tip opened his sleepy yellow eyes, waving his tail gently to and fro, from the tip of which he derived his name, its whiteness being in strong contrast to the rest of his fur, which was of jetty blackness.

"It ought to look well on this day of all days," sighed Barby, as she resumed her seat by the window. "I wish I could see how it looks. I wish I could see the face of my pretty nursling. But it is as surely hidden from my eyes as is hers who was placed beneath the turf seventeen years ago to-day. Ah, me!"

Just then there came the sound of a step—but not the light, elastic footfall for which she was watching, and the glow of expectancy faded from the face that was turned eagerly in the direction whence the sound proceeded.

"Ah, Tip, old fellow," said Elsie, as the cat lazily arose at her approach.

"You see I never come empty-handed," she added, placing her basket in one chair and seating herself in another. "Here's a beautifully-frosted cake, a bottle of wine, oranges, nuts and I don't know what all that Miss Irva sent you. Dear knows, it's heavy enough!"

"Isn't she coming?" said Barby, paying no heed to this tempting enumeration.

"No, not to-day; she has gone to town for Mrs. Sutton. She will be here to-morrow, if nothing happens. But she hasn't forgotten you, you see."

Poor Barby could not see, but her hands lingered lovingly among the evidences of her darling's thoughtfulness for her comfort.

"I will keep them until she does come," she said, putting the contents of the basket into the cupboard.

As she took out the bottle of wine Elsie exclaimed:

"Dear me! I had almost forgot what Miss Irva charged me so many times to remember. She wants you to be sure and drink her health, with many happy returns of the day."

The sightless eyes moistened.

"Dear child! so I will, with all my heart."

"She told me not to go until I had seen you drink it: so, if you take it now, I'll be jogging, for I have a deal to do before sunset."

Barby took two glasses from a corner of the cupboard.

"You must take some, too; it will do you good after your long walk."

Elsie made no objections; taking the bottle from Barby's hand she poured a little into her own glass, but filling her companion's to the brim.

Barby raised it to her lips.

"God bless my pretty nursling!" she said; "and grant, a year from to-day, that Blind Barbara's Secret may be one no longer!"

Elsie raised her glass, also, but not to her lips, keeping her eyes fixed upon her companion's face as she drained the last drop out of hers.

A slight shiver passed through Barbara's veins as she replaced the glass on the table. Then the cheeks flushed to crimson, and raising her hand to her forehead she sunk back in her chair.

"How—how strong that wine must be. It makes me feel so—so very strangely!"

A moment later she uttered a faint cry, and would have rushed from the house but for Elsie's detaining arm, who replacing her in her chair held her there.

She struggled for a few minutes, and then the paroxysm seemed to pass, and she lay quiet, muttering incoherently, her eyes half-closed, and apparently taking no cognizance of anything around her.

For nearly half an hour Elsie stood by Barby, watching her, in whom there was no perceptible change, then she went to the door.

As she stood there, inwardly debating as to whether it would be safe to leave her alone, she saw a girl about ten, with bare, brown legs and feet, a gingham sunbonnet on her head, and a tin pail in her hand, on the other side of the way.

"Cinthy, Cinthy Belden!"

Cynthia crossed over to where Elsie stood.

"Where are you going?"

"To Mrs. Sutton's, to see if she don't want to buy my berries. See how nice they be. Do you think she'll want 'em?"

"Yes; I'll take them to her, myself. I want you to stay with Barby, who is very sick. Mrs. Sutton will either come herself or send some one, and then you'll get pay for the berries, and something besides."

The girl was nothing loth. And, emptying the berries into her basket, Elsie took her way back.

CHAPTER VI.

ASTONISHMENT AND SORROW.

IRVA had a world of trouble in matching the sample of silk given her by Mrs. Sutton, and it was nearly sundown when she returned.

Knowing her impatient temper, she immediately sought her room.

She found Elsie there, sewing in one of the deep bay-windows.

"Where is your mistress, Elsie?"

"She's down to blind Barby's, who is very sick. She has been there all the afternoon."

The weary, dispirited look vanished from Irva's face.

"Sick—Barby sick? What is the matter with her?"

"I don't know, miss. You see, soon after you was gone, Mrs. Sutton sent me with the basket of things, and to tell her that you'd be there to-morrow; so the poor thing wouldn't be worryin'. I knew somethin' was the matter with her the moment I looked at her. She sat in her chair, muttering and talkin' to herself, and the strangest that ever was; an' not a word could I get out of her that had the least bit of sense or reason in't."

"How strange! I saw her yesterday, and never saw her looking better."

Elsie dropped her eyes demurely upon her work.

"That's often the way, miss, with them that's sick, just before they're took down; they're more bright an' chipper than ever they were in their lives."

Without heeding, if she heard this, Irva retied the hat that she had not removed, and turned to the door.

"I must go and see her. I wish I had gone this morning, as I promised."

"There is Mrs. Sutton, now."

Following the direction of Elsie's eyes, Irva saw Mrs. Sutton coming up the steps.

Stepping through the low, open window, she met her as she reached the porch.

"How is Barby?"

"Better. I left her sleeping."

"I think you had better stay with her to-night," continued Mrs. Sutton, turning to Elsie. "Cynthia Belden is with her now, a very well-disposed girl, but too young and inexperienced to be safe should Barby have another attack similar to those she has already had."

"I will go, too."

Mrs. Sutton turned toward Irva with an air of surprise.

"You! What good can you do her?"

Irva's cheeks flushed and her eyes kindled.

"I can do her more good than either of you. I can watch, nurse, tend her. She would rather have me with her than any one else."

Mrs. Sutton regarded the speaker with an air of cold surprise.

"No doubt you would do very wonderful things! But I happen to have some responsibility in the matter, and cannot allow you to take it entirely out of my hands. You cannot say that I have ever interfered with your excessive fondness for your nurse, or hers for you, but now the case is different. The woman is in a very critical state of mind, and everything depends on her being kept perfectly quiet. Your presence would only serve to excite her, even if she recognized you, which is doubtful."

It was in vain that Irva pleaded; all she could obtain was the privilege of accompanying Elsie and just looking at her as she lay in what looked more like a stupor than sleep.

Irva could not keep the tears from her eyes as she saw the change that a few short hours had wrought; the eyes were sunken, with dark lines around them, while around the mouth and upon the forehead was a troubled look, such as she had never seen there before.

Elsie had strict injunctions not to let Irva stay more than five minutes, and she did not forget them.

Pressing her lips softly to the limp, unconscious hand that lay on the counterpane, Irva followed her beckoning finger to the door.

"What do you think is the matter with poor Barby, Elsie?"

Elsie tapped her forehead mysteriously with her forefinger.

Irva stood, for a moment, transfixed with horror, and there was an appealing look in her eyes that would have touched with pity a heart less cold and hard.

"But of course she will get better? it is not anything that will last?"

"She might, an' then again she mightn't," was the not very consoling reply, but with which Irva was obliged to content herself.

She sadly retraced her way back, her heart filled with as much compunction as sorrow, and which was not lessened at the sight of Mrs. Sutton, who was sitting out on the porch in the moonlight, enjoying the cool evening breeze.

Stephen was leaning against one of the pillars, smoking, removing his cigar at her approach.

Mrs. Sutton glanced keenly at the face, on which traces of tears were plainly visible.

"You found poor Barby looking very ill?"

"I never supposed any one could change so in such a short time. Why has she no doctor?"

"Simply because there is none in this vicinity that can understand the peculiarities of her case. Her disease is mental, not physical. If she gets no better, I shall send to New York for a physician, or else take her there."

"I shall never forgive myself that I did not see her, as I promised. If I had, this might never have happened."

"You talk very foolishly, Irva, and display more vanity than I thought you capable of. What difference do you suppose your being with her would have made? This is not something of new origin; it has been coming on for some time. I have seen for some months that Barby's mind was failing, and of late it has been painfully apparent. I was fearful of this, though I hoped to stave it off by avoiding everything calculated to irritate and disturb. She has had very strange ideas of late, but I have made it a point not to contradict her, no matter how absurd or preposterous her statements."

There was more in these words than appeared upon the surface, as Irva well knew, and she turned a startled, inquiring look upon the speaker's face.

But suddenly bethinking herself of Stephen's presence, whose keen eyes were attentively watching her, she merely said:

"I have failed to discover anything absurd or preposterous in her statements, though I have been with her more than any one."

Wearied both in body and mind, Irva sought her own room, but not to sleep; anxious and troubled thoughts for some hours drove sleep from her pillow.

Barby was not only the tender nurse of her infancy, but the only true friend she had ever had, and with the grief she felt at the terrible misfortune that had overtaken her was mingled an inexpressible feeling of desolation.

Even when she believed that there was the near tie between them of mother and daughter, she was conscious that Mrs. Sutton not only had no affection for her, but that there was at times a feeling of repressed, but positive aversion.

The rest of the household were mere dependents, selected by Mrs. Sutton with a sole view to their usefulness to her. For reasons of her own, she was desirous that Irva should not exercise over these any influence or authority, which they were not slow to perceive. So, though they treated her with outward respect, they were careful not to evince any particular interest in one in whom their mistress evidently took so little.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FRUITLESS APPEAL.

IRVA had made up her mind to go down to Barby's cottage immediately after breakfast, without saying a word to any one, but she was forestalled by Mrs. Sutton, who, as she arose from the table, said:

"I am going to see Barby, Irva. You can go with me, if you like."

Irva would have much preferred to go alone, but there was no help for it. So getting her hat, she joined Mrs. Sutton on the lawn, and the two set out, followed by Cynthia with a basket, who being willing and good-natured, Mrs. Sutton had taken temporarily into her service.

"If Barby don't get better I shall have her taken to the house," said Mrs. Sutton, as the cottage came into view; "it is too much work to take proper care of her here."

"She is, she must be better!" said Irva, as she hurried in through the gate past Mrs. Sutton, who said:

"Stop out here, Irva, until I see how Barby is."

Irva's heart swelled with a sense of wrong

and impatience as Mrs. Sutton went into the cottage, and closing the door, left her outside; never did she feel so much inclined to break through the iron rule to which she had been subjected all her life.

Looking through the window she saw the dim outline of a form reclining in an easy-chair, and which she knew to be Barby's, and a great load seemed lifted from her heart.

"She must be better, or she wouldn't be sitting up!" was her glad reflection as Elsie came to the door, and silently motioned her to come in.

For a moment Irva stood silently by the chair, then she said:

"Barby."

She was evidently awake, but not a quiver of the eyelid, not a muscle of the face showed that she heard this.

A cold hand seemed laid upon the warm heart that beat so hopefully a few moments before.

Touching her lips to one of the cold, listless hands, Irva said:

"Dear nurse, it is I, Irva. Don't you know me, Barby?"

Something in these words, the tender, pleading tone, awoke a faint echo in the dim chambers of the memory; the dull, apathetic expression changed to one of anxiety and pain.

Raising slowly both hands to her forehead she stretched them out, clutching the empty air like one trying to get hold of something that eluded them.

"I—I used to know; but it has gone. Everything has gone! God help me!"

The last sentence ended in a cry, so wild and sharp that it struck terror to Irva's soul.

Mrs. Sutton came quickly forward.

"You must not excite her so! Take her out of the room, Elsie."

Irva had no strength to resist, even if she had cared to do so, the strong arm that pushed her from the room. Sinking down upon the grass, she tried to shut out the cries and moans, mingled with incoherent words, which came to her from within, but which gradually grew fainter and fainter, and finally ceased altogether.

When Mrs. Sutton came out, in her shawl and hat, she found Irva lying on the ground, with her face pressed close to the turf.

"Come, get up, Irva; this is no place for you, on the damp ground."

Irva arose to her feet, looking into the composed face of the speaker, in which there was not the slightest trace of color or excitement.

"This is dreadful!"

Whether from motives of policy, or because she was really touched by the sight of the pale face, from which all light and gladness had vanished, Mrs. Sutton's voice was unusually gentle, as she said:

"It is, indeed, a sad spectacle, child; and from which I would gladly have spared you. I ought not to have let you come; but I knew you would never be satisfied until you had."

"I would not mind it," sobbed Irva, "if I could only do her any good."

"But you cannot; your presence only makes her worse, as you must see. It was your presence and what you said to her that threw her into such a state of excitement."

"It is very strange. When she was well she loved me so dearly, and never seemed so happy as when I was with her."

"It is generally so, I believe, with those whose minds are affected; they dislike those they formerly loved best."

"I left Barby asleep. You can look in on her if you like; then we must be going. Be careful and not awake her."

Irva stood, with hushed breath, by the couch where Barby lay in a repose so heavy and unnatural that but for the breath that came faintly through the parted lips, it would have seemed like death. But it was so much better than the agony of the paroxysms that had just passed that she went away almost comforted.

As mistrustful as Irva was of Mrs. Sutton, and as little faith as she had in the sincerity of the sudden interest she took in Barby, she could not but acknowledge that she had the best of care and attention, and that nothing was left undone that could in any way contribute to her comfort. Indeed, the personal trouble and inconvenience to which Mrs. Sutton subjected herself was something incomprehensible and altogether unlooked for.

There was something mysterious in the tie between those two, with whom there was neither kindred or the bond of sympathy or feeling.

Barby had nothing in the world but her cottage and its simple furniture. Her wants were few and simple, but they were all supplied from Mrs. Sutton's bounty, a bounty bestowed with

no manifestation of affection, and received with no expression of gratitude.

There was no apparent restriction placed upon Irva seeing Barby, and she looked in upon her every day; always with the hope of finding some change in her. But there was none, except that she seemed to sink deeper and deeper in the torpor that benumbed her intellect.

She paid no more heed to her coming and going than if she had been a statue.

Mrs. Sutton or Elsie was always present at these times, so she had no opportunity to speak to Barby, even if she had dared to do so after her experience of the distressing effect of her former effort, and which, however strange it seemed to her, she could not gainsay.

There was another thing that troubled Irva not a little; the time had passed in which Mrs. Sutton had promised to reveal to her the secret of her parentage, which she had not only failed to do, but ignored the subject altogether.

At first she ascribed this to the preoccupation of mind occasioned by Barby's condition, but as days passed and no allusion was made to it, her opinion changed. Added to this were various remarks by Mrs. Sutton, giving color to the idea that Barby's mind was beginning to be affected prior to the revelation made known to the reader in the opening chapter of our story.

Irva did not believe this; so it had no other effect than to convince her that she did not intend to redeem her promise.

It was often on her mind to speak to her on the subject, but no opportunity presented itself; either Stephen, Elsie or some one of the servants were within hearing, and she did not care to discuss the matter before them.

One morning Mrs. Sutton startled Irva by the announcement that she intended to take Barby to New York.

"The change will do her good," she said; "and then she will have the benefit of the advice of a celebrated physician there, who makes a specialty of such cases."

Many conflicting thoughts were aroused by these words, as the changing color in Irva's face testified.

"I hope you will not go without telling me what you promised?"

"Concerning what?"

Irva could not entirely conceal her irritation at Mrs. Sutton's assumption of unconsciousness.

"You surely cannot have forgotten? I refer to the message that Barby sent you, before she was taken ill, and what you then promised to tell me."

Mrs. Sutton regarded the young girl with a smile of wondering pity, and then signed Elsie to leave the room.

"Is it possible, Irva, that you place any dependence on the hallucinations of a person in the condition of poor Barby?"

"It is quite possible, madam," said Irva, with a dignity that Mrs. Sutton had not looked for, "for me to place the strongest reliance upon what Barby told me when she was as sane as you or I."

"Then it becomes my duty to inform you that what she told you is without the slightest foundation, with the exception that you are not my child. Since Barby's mind began to fail her, she has been impressed with the preposterous idea that you are the daughter of a man of wealth and position, from whom I am wrongfully detaining you. You ought to be able to see, yourself, the foolishness of this. What possible object could I have in so doing?"

It was painful to see the doubts and fears in the ingenuous face of the listener to this appeal; which was unanswerable, though it so utterly failed to convince.

Mrs. Sutton continued:

"I am sorry to destroy such a pretty romance, but the fact is, no mystery hangs over your birth, except what is, unfortunately, too common, that you are the child of one who was a mother but not a wife."

As Irva recalled the pure, sweet face of which she had obtained a passing glimpse, her heart rebelled fiercely against this.

"Who was my father?"

"Properly speaking, you have none. The man to whom you owe your being had a family at the time of his acquaintance with your mother. It would do you no good to know his name, or whereabouts, and it might do much harm to innocent parties. He is in no condition to help you, even if he felt disposed to do so, which is not likely, as you have no legal claim upon him."

These were hard and cruel words to hear, and the bare possibility that they might be true made them fall with crushing weight upon the young and sensitive heart of the listener:

and for some minutes after Mrs. Sutton had left the room Irva sat like one stunned and bewildered.

"Oh! if Barby were only well that I might question her!" she moaned.

But, in her present state, she might as well question the blank wall before her.

Having decided to take Barby to New York, Mrs. Sutton made immediate preparations to that end.

It was arranged that she should take Elsie with her; dismissing the rest of the servants, with the exception of a man and his wife who were to take charge of the house.

Nothing was said to Irva as to whether she was to go or be left behind, and she asked no questions.

The idea of being separated from Barby was very distasteful to her, especially in the painful and perplexing situation in which she found herself. If she never saw her again, how was this mystery to be cleared up?

It was clear to Irva that the passive and unquestioning obedience that Barby rendered to whatever Mrs. Sutton said, or suggested, was the effect of the influence of a strong will over a mind dulled and weakened by disease. The feeling was strong in her that if she could have an interview with her nurse, free from Mrs. Sutton's presence, or Elsie's, she might be able to get hold of some clew that would lead to the solution of the riddle that so pained and puzzled her.

And though she well knew the risk she ran in being detected, and how angry Mrs. Sutton would be at its knowledge, she determined to make the attempt.

She chose the time when she knew Mrs. Sutton and Elsie were at the house, and very busy; being careful to take a different direction, when she started, from what she usually took in going to the cottage.

This way was considerably longer, but Irva walked very swiftly, and was not long in traversing it.

Looking through the window, she saw Barby sitting in the same place, and almost in the same position, in which she saw her last, her head resting upon a pillow at the back of her chair, and her hands folded listlessly in her lap.

She saw Cynthia in the next room, through the open door, who was evidently "on guard." As soon as the girl saw Irva, she seized her sun-bonnet, and went out by the back way.

Irva knew where and for what purpose she had gone, and it served to quicken her movements.

"Dear Barby!"

Irva's heart beat fast; there certainly was a change in the face to which her eyes were lifted so earnestly, though it hardly amounted to recognition.

"You know Irva, Barby, don't you?—your baby, your nursling?"

"She is gone—everybody is gone."

"Oh! no, Barby, you are wrong; she is here; right beside you. Oh! Barby, there is something that I want so very, very much to know; the secret of my birth, who my parents were? You said you would tell me, if Mrs. Sutton refused to do so, and she does refuse. Who were they, Barby?"

It was pitiful to see the effort made by Barby to throw off the torpor that benumbed her faculties. But it was all in vain.

"I—I don't know."

"Oh! Barby, you do, you must know! Don't you remember what you told me? Try to remember."

Again that look of pain and perplexity, followed by one of utter hopelessness.

"I—I can't remember."

"Who was my mother?"

Just then there came the sound of a quick, hurried step, and a sudden tremor shook the hand that Irva held closely in hers.

"She, she is coming!"

Irva heard that step, and knew well what it portended, but she went on:

"Who was my father?"

The change that came over that impassive face was almost startling.

She raised her clenched, trembling hand.

"He was a—murderer!"

Irva was too much horrified to heed the form that was now standing back of her, too well satisfied with the scene before her to care to interrupt it.

Rising, aghast, to her feet, she faltered:

"A murderer?"

"Yes. He murdered your poor mother—broke her heart!"

Poor Irva knew only too well what this implied, but she was determined to know the worst.

"He wronged—betrayed her, then?"

"He wronged, betrayed, murdered her!"

Mrs. Sutton now interposed.

"Rash, perverse, headstrong girl! what do you mean by such conduct? Do you want to kill Barby? I forbid you saying another word to her!"

Irva had no disposition to do this; disappointed and heartsick, she turned away, glad to escape the cruel eyes that had in them far less anger than triumph.

Mrs. Sutton now turned her attention to Barby, whose flushed face and dilated eyes indicated the strong excitement under which she was laboring.

Giving her a swallow of something from a glass that she held to her lips, she stood by her for some minutes, holding one hand firmly in hers, and smoothing with soft, caressing touch the hair from her temples.

It was not long before Barby lay as quietly, and as seemingly void of all thought and feeling, as when Irva entered.

On perceiving this, Mrs. Sutton moved toward the window where Irva sat; a feeling of desolation in her young heart, such as she had never experienced before.

"I should be seriously offended with you, Irva, did I not know that your foolish and idle curiosity had wrought its own punishment. So all that I will say to you is that I positively forbid your having anything further to say to Barby during the remainder of her stay here, which—fortunately for her—is very short. It is impossible for her ever to recover while she is so continually excited and disturbed. If you had the affection that you pretend to have for her, you wouldn't do so. Come, I'm going to the house, and I want you to go with me. I can't trust you here."

Without replying to this, even by a look, Irva went into the next room.

Mrs. Sutton followed.

"What are you after?" she inquired, as she saw Irva open one of the drawers of the bureau.

"I want my mother's picture. It is in this box. Where is the key?"

Mrs. Sutton looked into that pale, resolute face, and then taking the key from the chain around her neck, handed it to her.

Irva unlocked the box, taking the object of her search from among the trinkets and keepsakes; then turning the key returned it to Mrs. Sutton, saying:

"I have a better right to it than any one."

"I have no wish to deprive you of what must be so very precious to a daughter's heart!"

Stung by the covert sneer in these words, Irva turned upon her tormentor.

"It is precious to me!—my poor, wronged, unhappy mother!"

"When your father comes to claim you you can show it to him. He will need no other proof that you are his child."

"Whoever this man may be he is less than nothing to me! He gave to her death, and to me shame and sorrow, and, though he may call me child, I will never call him father!"

Mrs. Sutton laughed.

"No matter; some day I will send him to you."

CHAPTER VIII.

NEW SCENES AND HOME.

AFTER Mrs. Sutton had gone, as she did the following day, a great silence fell upon the big, roomy house, whose inmates were narrowed down to very few.

Stephen went with her, but returned the next day, with a message to Irva from Mrs. Sutton, that as soon as she got well settled, she would send for her.

The only satisfaction that this promise afforded Irva sprang from the thought that she would not be entirely separated from Barby, so but what she would be able to know something as to how it was with her.

At Mrs. Sutton's request, as he was careful to inform her, Stephen remained; making himself very much at home, and treated with great deference by the man and his wife who had charge of the house.

Irva kept her own room as much as possible; for though Stephen had dropped the air of easy familiarity so offensive to her at their first acquaintance, he invariably sought her society whenever it was possible for him to do so. And, in spite of all his deference, there was an indefinable something in his manner that showed that he considered it his right thus to seek her, and which fretted her all the more that he gave her no tangible cause for complaint.

One morning, about a week after Mrs. Sutton's departure, Stephen handed her a letter.

It was from Mrs. Sutton, saying that she was pleasantly located in a house in the suburbs of Brooklyn, and directing him to bring Irva on to her immediately on its reception.

Irva was not ill-pleased at this news; for she was not only in a state of mind to welcome most any change, but anxious as to how it was with Barby, of whom the letter made no mention.

Irva's simple preparations were soon made.

So secluded had been her life that, though living within sound of the cars, she had never been inside of them; so it was a pleasant novelty to her to find herself borne swiftly along past farm-houses and through villages toward the great metropolis, of whose sights and wonders she had read, but never thought to see.

Stephen watched with amused interest the heightened color and the innocent joy and wonder that looked out of the big brown eyes of the young girl beside him, and which were so absorbing as to make her quite oblivious of his presence, as it wounded his vanity not a little to perceive.

"How lovely she is!" he thought, "and how very unsophisticated! She might fall into worse hands than mine."

With this thought, by which he sought to gloss over the evil designs of his bad heart, Stephen addressed himself to his paper.

It was dusk when the cars rolled into the Grand Central Depot.

As Stephen assisted her out, Irva was so confused by the noise, bustle, and hurrying to and fro, that she was glad to accept the arm he offered her.

"I thought that perhaps Mrs. Sutton would be here to meet us," he said, looking around. "But it is some distance from Brooklyn, and she knows that I am perfectly familiar with the way."

Nodding to one of the many hands stretched out to him, Stephen placed his charge in one of the long array of carriages that lined the street.

For some time Irva amused herself by watching the crowds of people revealed by the glancing lights as she whirled along, but when she reached the ferry she grew drowsy.

The house mentioned in Mrs. Sutton's letter was situated on one of the interminable avenues that lead out of Brooklyn, the remote part of which was thinly settled.

"Is it much further?" said Irva, rousing herself and peering out into the darkness.

"No; we are very near it now," was the reassuring reply. "Mrs. Sutton selected a house in this vicinity in order that she might have a quiet place for your poor old nurse."

This was very satisfactory to Irva, who began to muse on this new phase in Mrs. Sutton's character. When had she before manifested so much regard for the comfort of her humble and helpless dependent?—or, in fact, for any one?

She began to think that she must have more affection for Barby than she had given her credit for.

At last the carriage stopped, though it was only to let Stephen open a gate, through which it passed.

The house was situated in the midst of ample grounds, dotted with trees and shrubbery, the dim outlines of whose foliage could be seen as Irva stepped from the carriage.

It was a square, substantial-looking building, with broad stone steps, on the top of which were huge pillars that supported the porch that jutted over the door.

The front part of it was in darkness, but from a bay-window at the side a bright light was gleaming.

A servant obeyed the summons of the bell, to which Stephen gave an energetic pull, ushering them into a cheerful and pleasant room in the rear, where they were almost immediately joined by a stout, buxom-looking woman, in a widow's cap and with a very subdued and pensive expression.

She seemed well known to Stephen, who shook hands with her, introducing her to Irva as Mrs. Haverstraw.

"This is the young lady you were expecting, Mrs. Haverstraw; my cousin's adopted daughter, Miss Irva Sutton."

Mrs. Haverstraw smiled very sweetly upon Irva.

"To be sure. Very happy to see Miss Sutton."

"I suppose Mrs. Sutton has not retired, as yet?"

"I really couldn't take upon myself to say, sir," responded Mrs. Haverstraw, dropping her eyes discreetly to the floor. "Mrs. Sutton took the boat this morning for some place on the

Hudson—I forget its name—to consult some physician there in regard to her poor sick friend."

Stephen glanced at Irva, whose countenance showed disappointment and surprise.

"Yes, I remember her speaking of some doctor up there that she wanted to see. She will be back in a day or two."

"Oh, I make no doubt of that, sir. She charged me to make you and Miss Sutton as comfortable as possible during her absence, which I shall take great pleasure in doing."

"Miss Sutton is looking very tired; her room is in readiness if she would like to go to it."

Miss Sutton would like nothing better; and following Mrs. Haverstraw, found herself in a large and pleasant room, whose rosewood furniture, snowy curtains and daintily-draped bed gave it a very bright and cheerful aspect.

After looking around to see if everything was as it should be, her conductress said:

"Now, if there is anything that you would like in particular for your supper, just mention it and it shall be got. We have our regular dinner at six, but I delayed it to-night, knowing that you would not be here until late."

Irva was not accustomed to having her wishes so carefully consulted, and felt some compunction at the involuntary coolness of her manner toward one evidently so desirous of contributing to her comfort.

"Many thanks. Pray do not put yourself out in the least; anything that you have will be acceptable. I only beg that it may be served in my room, as I am very tired."

"I suppose Barby—the sick woman you spoke of—went with Mrs. Sutton?"

Mrs. Haverstraw paused, with her hand on the half-open door.

"Oh, dear, yes! She wouldn't go without her, whatever she did. I never saw such devotion in all my life, never! Your good mamma would never let any one else give her a bit of medicine, or take food herself, until she knew the poor woman was served. It used to almost bring tears to my eyes."

There was something overstrained in this; and wearied and depressed in spirits, Irva felt relieved when she was left to herself.

The tempting repast brought by the neatly-dressed servant was a very substantial one, consisting of half a broiled chicken, a hot baked potato, toast and tea, together with a dainty dessert of berries and cream. And despite the depression upon her spirits, and the feeling that it was a little strange that Mrs. Sutton should have left, almost immediately after summoning her to the city, Irva did not feel at all disinclined to break thus pleasantly her long fast.

Then, seating herself by the open window, she drew the curtains aside and looked out, trying to get some definite idea of her surroundings.

But she could see nothing but masses of trees and bushes. If any other dwelling was near, the heavy foliage of these hid it from view.

She could not help musing on her strange position; alone, in a great city, far from everybody and everything she had known.

Then she bethought herself of Him "who careth for the stranger," who "defends the widow and the fatherless," and a feeling of peace and security took the place of the sad and lonely thoughts that oppressed her.

Taking a little worn volume from her sachel, Irva read the beautiful psalm: "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want!*"

Then committing herself to the loving care and guidance of the only Father she had ever known, she laid her head upon her pillow and fell asleep, guarded securely from all the evil that surrounded her by Him whose eye never slumbers, and who is the "sure defense of all who put their trust in Him."

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT DID IT MEAN?

WHEN Irva awoke the next morning, she saw by the sun that streamed brightly through the half-open shutters that it was late.

She had scarcely completed her simple toilet when Mrs. Haverstraw tapped at the door.

"Good-morning, Miss Irva. I thought I heard you stirring about, and came to say that Ellen is making fresh coffee, and that your breakfast will be ready as soon as you are."

"I am really ashamed to put you to so much extra trouble, Mrs. Haverstraw; but I was up much later last night than I am accustomed to being, and so overslept."

"It is no trouble whatever. Mr. Sully took an early breakfast, as he had to go over to the

city: but he charged me not to disturb you, but let you sleep as long as you would."

Irva followed Mrs. Haverstraw down to the breakfast room, whose pleasant aspect was enhanced by the eggs, coffee and hot muffins that awaited her.

Mrs. Haverstraw re-entered the room just as Irva was rising from the table.

"Your mamma left me a very pleasant commission," she said, with a smile; "the replenishing of your wardrobe which I perceive is sadly needed."

"Of course your dress is very nice for the country, my dear," added Mrs. Haverstraw, as Irva glanced down with heightened color upon the plain, neatly fitting skirt of gray, which was her "best," "but in the city people dress so differently, you know, very naturally your friends are anxious to have you attired in accordance with your new prospects, and the very different society they will open to you."

"If you knew me as well as you think you do," smiled Irva, "you would know that I am but a simple country girl, with no prospects whatever."

"I know more than you think!" was the significant response.

Then, without seeming to notice the startled look in Irva's eyes, Mrs. Haverstraw added:

"Mr. Sully said he would send a carriage to take us to the city, and here it is. So run and get your hat."

Irva had no time to make any objections, if she had had any to make. Her heart beat fast at the thought of riding in that beautiful carriage, drawn by a pair of splendid bays, who stood pawing the ground and arching their necks at the door.

Mrs. Haverstraw drove directly to "Stewarts," not only astonishing but alarming poor Irva by the extent and variety of her purchases, especially as she was led to infer that they were all for her benefit.

When she began to select the second silk Irva felt that she could no longer keep silent.

"My dear Mrs. Haverstraw, I cannot permit you to purchase anything further for me; you have already bought more than I can ever think of wearing."

"What nonsense, child," said Mrs. Haverstraw, who was in the best possible humor; "I have bought nothing that you don't absolutely need. Besides, the expense don't come out of my pocket."

"I know," persisted Irva; "but there really is no one from whom I have any right to expect such costly presents."

"You are wrong," said her companion, in the significant tone she had used once before; "there is one from whom you have the best possible right to expect them."

A sudden tremor shook Irva's frame. Did she, could she refer to the father, whom she regarded with such strange feelings of mingled tenderness and indignation—tenderness for all that the name implied, and indignation at his cruel desertion?

Had he repented of his treatment of her and her helpless mother, and taken this way to atone?

Her brain grew busy at the very thought.

In the meantime, Mrs. Haverstraw was busy at the silk counter. Having ordered the clerk to cut off the requisite number of yards she turned to Irva.

"Goodness me! how pale you are looking! Are you so easily used up as this? Come upstairs, and look at the hats; and then we will have a rest."

Almost feeling as if she was the heroine of some fairy story, Irva seated herself in the elevator; with difficulty suppressing a shriek as she found herself suddenly lifted from the floor.

Mrs. Haverstraw smiled as she saw Irva's perturbation.

"You must learn not to be surprised at anything, my dear," she said, with the patronizing air of one who had seen too much of the world to show any such weakness.

Sailing up to one of the saleswomen, Mrs. Haverstraw demanded to see "some of her newest and prettiest hats."

After trying various of the bewildering collection onto Irva, and finding some fault with each, she selected one, a perfect marvel of artistic skill, in the shape of flowers, lace and ribbon, and paying for it gave directions to have it sent with the rest of the things.

"That is all, I believe," said Mrs. Haverstraw, consulting her watch. "It is most lunch-time. Mr. Sully said he would join us; and we will go down-stairs and wait for him!"

For some minutes Irva sat watching the moving panorama of beautifully-dressed ladies that swept past her in one steady stream.

So interested was she that she did not observe Sully's approach until she heard an ejaculation from Mrs. Haverstraw. Following the direction of her eyes, she saw him coming toward them, with an eager smile upon his lips.

Just then a tall, elegantly-dressed lady, with a plain, but very expressive countenance, came along from the opposite direction.

As soon as she saw Sully she smiled and nodded.

Without giving Irva the slightest sign of recognition, Sully sprang past them, greeting the new-comer with an appearance of great joy.

After talking with her a few minutes he moved along with her in the direction in which she was going, without giving Irva even a look though they passed so near her that the lady's robe brushed her own.

"It is because I am not fashionably dressed," thought poor Irva, as she looked down upon her modest garb; feeling the slight, though she cared so little for the source from whence it came.

Upon looking to see how Mrs. Haverstraw took this, she saw that she was over at the opposite counter, quite absorbed in the contemplation of the goods displayed there.

On Irva's joining her she took her arm, going in an opposite direction to that which Sully took.

"Mr. Sully won't be able to find us when he comes back," said Irva, innocently.

"He won't come back."

Mrs. Haverstraw surveyed Irva, evidently misinterpreting the disturbed look upon her face.

"There is nothing that he would like better; so you mustn't be angry with him."

Irva smiled.

"That would be very silly in me. I don't mind his going in the least. Only it looked a little odd."

"It might seem so to those unacquainted with the circumstances. The lady you saw with him is his sister; very notional, and a great invalid. She is exceedingly fond of him. In fact, almost as jealous of his attentions to any younger lady as if she was his wife. He is under considerable obligations to her, and so humors her as much as possible."

"Oh! I thought—"

Here Irva stopped, almost ashamed to say what she had thought.

"You thought," laughed Mrs. Haverstraw.

"Now be frank, and own that you thought her more to him than this."

"Oh! no. I didn't notice much about the lady, except that she had a very nice face. I thought that Mr. Sully did not care to notice me because of my unfashionable dress."

"You dear, silly child!" exclaimed Mrs. Haverstraw, in a tone of great relief, "it was nothing of the sort. You look better in that plain dress than his sister does in all her finery. Not but what dress will make a great difference in you, as you will see. But come, we will have a nice, quiet lunch all by ourselves, and then go home."

Irva enjoyed her lunch very much in the quiet and cosy nook selected by Mrs. Haverstraw from among the long row of tables.

She was just tired enough to make rest pleasant, just hungry enough to give zest to the cream and cakes before her.

At a short distance was an "aquarium" lined with shells and mosses, where gold and silver fish sported as freely and joyously as in their native element. Above this was a tiny fountain, whose soft spray fell in fine drops around, cooling the air.

And as Irva watched the merry groups that came and went, the waiters, moving so noiselessly about, and whose snowy aprons were in such strong contrast to their sable faces, she could not but feel that this change to her hitherto quiet and secluded life was a very pleasant one.

Mrs. Haverstraw added a plate of sandwiches to Irva's order, to which she did ample justice, "topping off," as she called it, with cheese and apple-pie.

"I can't live on such flummery as that," she laughed, glancing at Irva's dainty fare; "I want something substantial."

The waiter now brought on two tumblers containing a colored mixture, in which were straws, and to which Mrs. Haverstraw applied herself with great gusto.

"Don't be afraid of it, child; it won't hurt you," she said, as Irva pushed hers back, regarding it with a look of disfavor.

"There is spirit in it?"

"Only a drop of wine, the merest dash in the world. Not enough to hurt a fly. Try it, it will do you good."

Irva shook her head.

"I'd rather not. I don't like it and don't need it."

"I don't like it, either," said Mrs. Haverstraw, who, having disposed of every drop in her own glass, now took Irva's; "but my doctor says I must, that my constitution requires it, and I find that it supports me wonderfully."

Mrs. Haverstraw certainly manifested very commendable zeal in following her physician's advice, for she did not rise from the table while a drop remained in the glass.

She was in high spirits and very talkative; entertaining Irva, on their ride home, with a glowing description of the sights and gayeties of the great city, and which, one by one, were to be unfolded to her wondering eyes.

"You are very fortunate, my dear. Stephen is acquainted with everything worth seeing and will be such a delightful escort. Poor fellow! I'm so sorry for his disappointment; he was counting so much on lunching with us!"

This was the first time that Irva had heard Mrs. Haverstraw call Mr. Sully by his Christian name.

"You have known Mr. Sully some time?"

"Ever since he was a boy; in fact, we were children together; and always the same honorable, kind-hearted, generous creature that you see him now. She'll be a happy woman that gets him!"

Irva neither assented or dissented from this.

Mrs. Haverstraw studied for some moments the partly-averted face.

"Now, be frank with me, and say if you have not thought him—well, just a little fast?"

Irva colored. She had felt a sort of repugnance to Stephen at their first acquaintance—though it had sensibly lessened of late—but had never thought of putting it in that form.

"I don't flatter myself that my opinion of Mr. Sully is of much consequence."

"You are wrong. I, for one, would feel very sorry to have you think ill of him."

"But I don't! It would be very ungrateful of me to think ill of one who has done me so many kindnesses, and never any harm."

Mrs. Haverstraw studied Irva's face again, as though a little doubtful as to the ground on which she stood.

"Mr. Sully belongs to a very wealthy family, and has always been in receipt of a large income. As a matter of course, his life has been a very gay one; but he is one of the most moral young men I ever knew!"

Mrs. Haverstraw made this assertion with an energy of look and tone that defied contradiction.

"I am glad to hear it."

Irva said this with an air of weariness, as though she did not care to pursue the subject further. She was not particularly interested in Stephen's merits or demerits, and just now her mind was full of other and more pleasant thoughts.

They were now nearly home, which was in the outskirts of the city, and leaning back in the carriage, Irva looked out upon the beautiful grounds and residences by which they were passing.

"Perhaps my father is living near me," she mused, "in one of these houses."

Various were the lights and shadows that flitted across Irva's face as she pursued this train of thought.

Mrs. Haverstraw watched them with wondering interest.

"A penny for your thoughts, my dear!"

Irva looked at the questioner for a moment. She felt, instinctively, that hers was not a nature to sympathize with all that her ardent imagination had pictured. But there was a question that had often been upon the tip of her tongue during the day, and now she uttered it.

"I was thinking of what you said this morning, that you knew more of me than I thought. What did you mean by it?"

Mrs. Haverstraw looked puzzled. She did not consider it prudent, at this stage of affairs, to tell Irva exactly what she did mean, nor did she want to relinquish the hold that she perceived her supposed knowledge—of whatever nature it might be—had on her mind.

So she shook her head, mysteriously.

"I am not at liberty to tell you, just now; when the proper time comes, you shall know. You would not want me to betray any confidence placed in me?"

"Not for worlds!" was the earnest response.

"I will not ask another question."

"I can tell you this much," pursued Mrs. Haverstraw, speaking with emphasis; "it is something that will make you consider yourself a very fortunate girl."

Irva's eyes grew very bright.

"I said I would ask no more questions, and I

will keep my word; but I can have my own thoughts."

The impulse was strong upon Mrs. Haverstraw to ask what these thoughts were, but she feared, if she did, that she would have to be more communicative than she cared to be.

Irva was glad to find herself alone in her own room, in order that she might give herself up to the happy thoughts that filled her heart.

The imagination is so vivid at that age that it takes very little to kindle it; and out of the meager material furnished her, poor Irva began to build very beautiful castles.

Not only Mrs. Haverstraw's hints, but her sudden summons to the city, Mrs. Sutton's mysterious departure, the costly presents lavished upon her, so different from anything she had ever known, all combined to arouse and confirm the new hopes that had sprung up in her heart.

From her earliest childhood, Irva had been prone to strange and tender imaginings concerning the father she had never seen, and of whose name she was now in ignorance, and this interest had been strengthened by words dropped, from time to time, by Barby, whose very refusal to satisfy her curiosity served only to enhance it. She often spoke of Mr. Sutton, but never as though he was anything to her.

Irva had somehow conceived the idea that her father was a former husband of her mother—as she had been taught to consider Mrs. Sutton. That the law, and not death, must have separated them was evident from the fact that, of late years, Barby had always spoken of him as being alive.

"Some day you shall know who your father is," she would say. "And high as he holds his head, he shall not be ashamed of my pretty nursling!"

Irva had never doubted but what she should some day find him, and that he would be worthy of all the love she was hoarding up in her heart for him.

True, Barby's words at their last interview had cruelly dispelled this illusion; but the longer she reflected upon her condition of mind, at the time, the less credence did she give to them.

Her "time to love" had not come. No realization of anything more tender than a father's love had flushed her cheek, or stirred her maiden heart.

And as she bowed her young head in prayer, she besought that He, "who brings mighty things to pass," would cause the realization of this, the first and dearest wish of her heart.

CHAPTER X.

THE HIDDEN SNARE.

WHEN Irva came down stairs the next morning, she found the various purchases of the day before strewn over the sofa and table, and Mrs. Haverstraw in a perfect ecstasy of admiration.

Irva had manifested so much indifference, and even reluctance at this outlay, that Mrs. Haverstraw was most agreeably surprised at the almost childish interest and delight with which she surveyed the beautiful and costly fabrics.

To that lady's assertion that "they must be made by a fashionable *modiste*, and in the most fashionable manner," Irva assented; and the greater part of the remainder of the week was spent in the selection of trimmings and designs, "fitting" and "trying on" that is entailed.

The love of the beautiful is inherent in woman's nature, and Irva took a genuine delight in seeing the beautiful silks, laces and muslins fashioned into still more beautiful garments.

That these were a father's gifts, to which she had the most sacred right, she never permitted herself to doubt.

"He wants to make sure that I shall not shame his name and station," she thought.

And she felt that she could not show her love and gratitude more than by making the most of the opportunities and adornments lavished so freely upon her.

Mrs. Haverstraw watched with interest this new phase to her character.

"She don't care two straws for Stephen," was her inward reflection; "but, in spite of all her Puritan ways and notions, she is fond of dress and admiration, and that is almost as strong a passion."

On the following Sunday, Stephen made his way over to Mr. Haverstraw's; finding that lady upon the sofa, reading a novel.

"Where is Miss Irva?"

"On her way to church. I saw her going out the front way about ten minutes ago, with a prayer-book in her hand."

"Confound it! I wish I had got along a little sooner."

"It wouldn't have made the slightest difference if you had; she would have gone to church, in spite of you, or any other man. She's a perfect little Puritan! I don't believe she'd omit her morning and evening devotions for the wealth of a kingdom."

Stephen shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't see where she got such notions; not from Lucia Sutton, that's certain."

"From what I know of that person, I should say not, most decidedly. But then, you must remember that she has been left almost exclusively to the care and society of her nurse; Lucia said as much herself. Do you know, Stephen, I think there is something very mysterious in the care and attention she bestows on that old woman? She can't make me believe that she hasn't some object in it; I know her too well. During all the time she was here, she never allowed me to speak to Barby unless she was present. It's my belief that the old woman knows something that Lucia is afraid she'll tell."

"To tell the truth, Nellie, I don't care what her object is, so long as I get mine. It strikes me that I am making very slow progress."

"Take my advice and go to church this morning, and make her think it to be your invariable practice. It will make a more favorable impression on her than anything you could do."

"Do you think so? It would be a pretty hard role for me to play, I fancy. The fact is, it's so long since I've seen the inside of a church that I shouldn't know how to behave. I have a mind to try it, though. I'll have a walk home with her at all events." What church did she go to?

"The one on the corner, four blocks below."

Stephen seized his hat, and was off.

Services had commenced when he reached the church; and for the first time in years he listened to the voice of prayer as it proceeded from the lips of a venerable, white-haired man, whose tremulous tones were full of feeling and fervor.

Had it been a theater, gambling-saloon, or, in fact, anything else, Stephen would have been perfectly at home, but as it was, no fish out of water was more completely out of his element than he, as he tiptoed himself into one of the pews near the door.

"At Rome do as the Romans do," he sneered, as he bent his unaccustomed knee upon the cushion.

He contrived to take a sly look around the church through his fingers, as he knelt, for which he was duly rewarded.

There, a few pews in front of him, was his divinity, entirely unconscious that she was in the presence of any one but Him, to whom her heart was ascending in such fervent prayer.

There was a rapt look upon the young face that reminded him of some heads of Raphael that he had seen in an old church in Rome.

But all that freshness and innocence aroused no feeling of reverence in the heart of the man, who sat drinking in its beauty of outline and coloring as he would a draught of wine.

He admired them, indeed, but it is only as some admire flowers; inhaling their fragrance for a moment, and then trampling them beneath their feet.

Stephen thought, or affected to think, the majority of those who professed religion to be hypocrites, who wore it as a mask, and the rest fools. An idea by no means uncommon with those of his ilk.

"She's sincere, whatever else she is," he thought, as he watched the devout manner with which she went through the service. "But saint or sinner, it is all the same to me. I'm not sure but her saintship gives her a new charm; it certainly adds the zest of novelty."

Just across the aisle from Irva were two young men, the elder and taller of whom often found his eyes wandering over to where she sat.

"How strangely familiar that face looks to me!" he thought. "I have, surely, seen it before, though I can't remember where."

When the service was ended Stephen lingered by the door, joining Irva as she came out.

The two men, before alluded to, were some distance back.

"Look!" said the elder one, "isn't that cousin Steve?"

"Where?"

"He's gone, now," said the first speaker, in a disappointed tone. "But I could almost swear that it was Steve, or his apparition."

"You may rest confident that it was his apparition, then," laughed his companion. "That exemplary cousin of yours is more noted for his attendance upon races, and other kindred follies, than any such place as this. Besides, what would bring him off out here?"

"By the way, Dick, did you see that sweet piece of dimity on the other side of us? You needn't say you didn't, for I saw you looking over there. By Jove, but I would have given something to have seen those long lashes lifted long enough for me to see what color the eyes were. She kept them so provokingly bent upon her prayer-book."

"Very possibly she saw something there that interested her," said Dick, a little dryly, the words and tones of his companion jarring upon his feelings, he could not have told why, if he had tried.

But to return to Stephen and Irva.

The color deepened in the cheeks of Irva as Stephen joined her; whether from surprise or pleasure he could not tell, though his vanity whispered the latter.

Desirous that she should think their meeting by accident, he said:

"How fortunate! This must be given me as a reward 'for being good,' as the children say, and going to church."

"I would rather hope that Mr. Sully found his reward in the feelings that drew him thither," was the softly-spoken reply.

"So I have," was Stephen's sneering reflection.

Then aloud:

"Very true. But it seems I am to have two rewards; one entirely unexpected."

He then began to praise the sermon, the text of which he had contrived to remember, skillfully turning the conversation on the religious topics of the day, of which he had gained a cursory knowledge through the papers.

He spoke of various benevolent schemes, of the efforts being put forth to disseminate religious instruction among the masses; appealing to, and deferring to her opinion with a delicate flattery far more dangerous to a nature like Irva's than the most glowing praise of her personal charms.

The surprise that she first felt deepened into genuine interest as he proceeded; an interest that was plainly visible in the large brown eyes that so often sought his, and which evinced a simple faith in all that he told her that amused as well as interested him.

"I am glad that you feel so," she said, as they ascended the steps. "I didn't know that you cared about such things."

He was rewarded for his "good, goody talk" as he privately termed it to Mrs. Haverstraw, by Irva's consenting to take a quiet drive with him out to the park, a little contrary to her principles, which were rather strict in such matters.

Mrs. Haverstraw went with them, but she took her novel with her, and ensconcing herself in the further corner of the roomy carriage, seemed to have neither eyes nor thoughts for anything else.

This arrangement suited Stephen very well; but he was careful to take no apparent advantage of it. Though quick to render her every attention she required, had she been a princess of the blood royal, and he one of her train, he could not have treated her with more deference and respect.

Satisfied with the progress he was making, he was content with sitting so close beside her; watching the lights and shadows that flitted across her face as she talked, which she did with more freedom and confidence than she had ever evinced before.

Mindful of the impression he had made, and anxious to deepen it, Stephen let the conversation insensibly drift into a channel suitable to the sacredness of the day and the estimation in which he knew his fair companion regarded it.

He led Irva to talk of her childhood, and her old nurse, with whom it was principally spent, and whose teachings and example had done so much to mold her character; partly because he knew it was a pleasant topic to her, and partly because there were some things he was anxious to ascertain.

"This old nurse of yours must not only be a very excellent person, but greatly superior in education and refinement to those in her walk of life?"

"She is, indeed," responded Irva. "I've often thought she must have once occupied a very different station. When I remember some things she said I am quite sure of it. Poor nurse! hers was a sad fate; blind, helpless and dependent. Yet she was so resigned and patient; I don't think I ever heard a murmuring word from her lips."

"Did she never tell you anything about herself or family?"

"No; she always seemed averse to talking about her past life. All her allusions to it were incidental—when she was not thinking, as it seemed."

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH STEPHEN SHOWS HIS HAND.

Stephen now began to tell Irva something of his own early life, mentioning incidents in his boyhood—many of them the product of his own invention, and the whole designed to give the impression that all the sins and follies of which he had been guilty were mainly the result of the wrong influences and training to which he had been subjected.

Encouraged by the interest with which Irva listened, he bewailed the lost time and opportunities of his youth.

"Not that I've done anything bad," he hastened to explain, as Irva opened her eyes a little at the depth of his contrition, "but so little good, you know."

"In fact," he added, with a deep sigh, "I find myself so different, every way, from what I ought to be, at my age, that I am almost in despair!"

There was something in all this that appealed strongly to Irva's warm, sympathetic heart, too simple and inexperienced to detect the hollowness and insincerity of these professions, and she felt called upon to respond with words of hope and encouragement; words received by Stephen with outward humility and thankfulness, but with an inward amusement that would have astonished and provoked Irva not a little had she known it.

There was something delightful to this man of the world, so versed in all its follies and sinful pleasures that they palled upon his senses, to look into those eyes, that mirrored forth so clearly the innocence, whose Eden he so burned to destroy.

The sympathies he had enlisted had clouded her perceptions, and he saw, with fiendish joy, the influence he was gaining over that confiding and credulous heart.

He had no thought of the invisible barriers between her soul and his, nor yet of the angelic influences at work to defeat his hellish plot. He scouted at the very idea of an overruling Power, the sure defense of all who commit their ways to Him.

Yet well did this man know if the girl who sat so smilingly beside him caught but the faintest glimpse of all that he was, she would shrink from him with horror and loathing.

So he covered it carefully from her view; deadening by the incense of flattery and adulation the pure instincts that are woman's surest safeguard and guide.

"I have to thank you for a very pleasant day," whispered Stephen, as he assisted her from the carriage; "one which will not soon be forgotten. My mother was a fashionable woman, who cared for nothing but dress and display, and her daughter followed in her footsteps. Had I been so fortunate as to have a sister like you I should be a different man from what I am."

Poor Irva! the tempter had found the vulnerable part of her armor.

She regarded the compliments that Stephen had lavished upon her personal beauty as something he would have paid to any pretty woman for whom he had a passing fancy.

He might have haphazardly by the hour on the beauty of her eyes or complexion without producing any other effect save annoyance. She did not value herself on these things; and nothing vexed her more than to discover that she was valued chiefly for the external beauty that she could not but know she possessed.

Thoroughly imbued with the delight of being of use, the thought that she had been able to influence to good a man of Stephen's years and experience, contained a subtle and delicious flattery that she was unable to resist.

With this was mingled some compunction.

"Poor fellow!" she thought. "I fear I have judged him too hardly. There really is a great deal of good in him. I declare! it was really pitiful to hear him talk about his neglected boyhood—neglected, in spite of all his wealth. I must try to help him."

Experience had not taught Irva that no help could come through her. That by that strange and unnatural perversion, by which good is turned into evil and a blessing to a curse, all that was pure, sweet and womanly in her only served to arouse to a still greater intensity the evil of that dark and evil nature, whose depths she could not fathom.

Poor foolish child! she needed help herself. Trouble was thickening about her; snares were weaving around her unwary feet, all the more dangerous because of the flowers that covered them.

The days that followed were very busy and happy ones to Irva, almost too busy for her to have time to think.

Stephen took her to all the sights of the city; to the Park, to Greenwood, to art galleries and various places of amusement. There was never a day that they did not go somewhere, and seldom an evening.

Mrs. Haverstraw generally accompanied them; Irva took care to have it understood that she expected this, and Stephen did not feel so sure of his ground as to think it prudent to run counter to her wishes in a point like this. But that lady was very discreet, and contrived to make her presence as little apparent as possible; she being conveniently blind and deaf to much that was passing around her.

The distrust that Irva had felt and evinced for Stephen had melted away beneath the gentle deference of his manner and the fair outside view he presented. She no longer avoided him, or treated him with reserve when they met. She laughed and chatted with him, expressing her opinions with girlish frankness on all that she saw and heard.

But there was something in this very frankness that annoyed Stephen; the unreservedness with which she showed him her whole heart let him see that he held no special place there.

In spite of the innocent freedom of her manner, there was a point beyond which he dared not go. He was shrewd enough to see that the privileges accorded him were based upon her unconsciousness of evil, not her toleration of it; that if her suspicions were once aroused, he could deceive her no more. He knew that Irva had a character and mental caliber beyond her years, and that he had a resolute, clear-sighted woman to deal with, if she were once aroused to the danger of her position and knowledge of his true character.

It is safe to say that Stephen did not find the restraints he was forced to put upon himself very easy or palatable. What he called love, and which was, perhaps, as near an approach to it as he was capable of, had grown stronger day by day. It partook of the selfishness and self-will that were inherent in the man, but it was genuine in its quality, and stronger in its degree than anything he had ever before experienced in his life.

In the meantime, Mrs. Haverstraw had had a letter from Mrs. Sutton, stating that Barby was so much improved by the treatment she was having that she should remain where she was for the present.

She made no allusion to Irva, except to hope that she was well and enjoying herself.

Irva had by no means forgotten the romance woven by her busy brain; she had added many a chapter to it from time to time, though it must be owned it was from material that a less active imagination could have made little use of.

One thing she specially noted, that she rarely expressed a wish or admiration for any article of personal adornment in the presence of Mrs. Haverstraw, but she found it on her bed or table soon after. That that lady was in communication with some friend of hers, whose ability was equal to his love, was clear to her.

And who should this be but the father she so yearned to see—and that Barby had often said would one day claim her?

How long was she to be banished from his presence? when would she be able to tell him that all the costly gifts he lavished upon her were nothing compared to his love?

One day, Irva found a beautiful set of sapphires on her dressing-table—the very one she had admired so much at Tiffany's only the day before. She recognized it as soon as she opened the velvet-lined case where it lay.

As she stood looking at it, lost in surprise and admiration, Mrs. Haverstraw entered.

She smiled as she saw what Irva was holding in her hand.

"He who gave you that and all your other beautiful presents, is below, waiting to see you."

Pale, almost breathless with suspense, Irva turned toward the speaker.

"Oh! tell me! is it he, my—"

"I didn't come to answer any questions, child," interrupted Mrs. Haverstraw with an impatient gesture, "but to help you dress. I want you to look as charming as possible. Where is that new silk?"

Bewildered by the thoughts and conjectures that filled her mind, Irva submitted passively to the hands that arrayed her in one of the

handsomest of her dresses. It was one of those rich brown silks, with a glint of gold in it, very heavy and lustrous, with the corsage sufficiently low to reveal the symmetry and exceeding fairness of the neck and shoulders.

Around these she drew a bertha of soft, creamy lace, fastening it at the throat with the pin belonging to the sapphire set on the table, whose azure light trembled as the bosom rose and fell with thoughts too big for utterance.

Clasping the bracelets around the arms, Mrs. Haverstraw led Irva in triumph to the mirror.

There was a wistful, beseeching expression in the eyes that looked out upon her.

No feeling of vanity stirred her heart, as she saw how fair and sweet that vision was; only this thought was there:

"Will my father love me?"

There came a tap at the door.

"There is a gentleman in the parlor waiting to see Miss Sutton."

Mrs. Haverstraw smiled.

"He is getting impatient, and no wonder. Come."

Like one in a dream, from which she feared to waken, Irva descended the stairs.

Mrs. Haverstraw followed close behind.

"Remember!" she whispered, "that he who is waiting to see you, is the best and truest friend you have, and receive him as he deserves."

Irva stood for a moment with her hand on the knob of the door, trying to still the throbbing heart which beat almost to suffocation, and then went in.

It was growing dusk. At the further end of the long drawing-room, she saw the dim outline of a man whose face was turned from her.

Attracted by the soft rustle of her trailing robes, he advanced eagerly toward her; pausing when within a few feet of her, as if checked by something he saw in the eyes, and which were fixed upon him with such a look of surprise and disappointment.

"Fairer of women! how can I sufficiently thank you for this frank and prompt acceptance of my gift, and all the delightful hopes to which it gives rise?"

The blood suddenly receded from Irva's face; glancing around the room, she looked into Stephen's face, as if but dimly comprehending his meaning.

"Your—gift?"

"Yes, mine. May I not hope your wearing of it to be a favorable augury in regard to the far more precious gift that I have come to ask at your hands?"

The tone in which this was spoken was very tender and seductive, but it was quite thrown away upon Irva. Indeed, it is doubtful as to whether her mind took in any but one point, the one that alone interested her.

"Am I to understand, Mr. Sully, that not only this, but all the gifts I have had, and which I supposed were from—"

Here Irva's feelings overpowered her, and her voice choked.

"Do you mean to tell me, sir," she resumed, "that all I have received during the six weeks I have been here, to be from you?"

"They certainly were," returned Stephen, not a little piqued at Irva's tone and manner.

"Who did you suppose they were from?"

"From him, who alone has any right to give me such—my father."

"Your father!"

As Stephen looked at Irva, from whose eyes the tears of disappointment and mortification were falling fast, he realized, as he never had before, not only how far she was from him, but from all that he would gladly make her.

Not all his arts and blandishments could call forth the slightest approach to any sympathy with the passion that had taken such strong and complete possession of him. She had been dreaming, not of a lover, but a father's love!

To do Stephen justice, the surprise he manifested at this discovery was genuine; he had no idea of the suppositions and illusions with which poor Irva had been deluding herself. The freedom and matter-of-fact way with which she received his presents, had led him to infer, of late, that she supposed they were from Mrs. Sutton; and he fancied that the time had come when he could safely disabuse her of the idea.

He was so puzzled and startled at the result as to hardly know what to do or say, a thing very unusual with him.

"This is a very unfortunate mistake, but you must not blame me for it. I supposed there was, at least, a tacit understanding on your part as to how it was."

The color came back to Irva's cheeks.

"I don't know why you should suppose anything of the sort, Mr. Sully. What right have you to give, or I to accept them?"

"The best of all rights—that which my love gives—a love that I never before felt for woman!"

Irva looked at the speaker.

For the first time Stephen let his long suppressed feelings find expression in the eye that met her own, and the revelation it gave her was as unexpected as unwelcome.

She knew that Stephen liked and admired her, but he had been so guarded that any such feeling as this she had never dreamed of. From words dropped by him, as well as Mrs. Haverstraw, she judged his family to be too high to admit of his marrying a portionless, nameless girl, and that he would offer anything less it never entered her innocent heart to conceive.

"You don't know what you are saying."

"I know that I love you, Irva; so madly, so entirely, that there is room for no other thought in my heart!"

"I am sorry."

"Why are you sorry?"

"I think any true woman must feel sorry to have a love proffered her that she cannot return."

"But you don't know that—how can you? You are so innocent and inexperienced that you don't know the capabilities of your own nature. You will love me, in time; I will be so true, so devoted, that you cannot help it!"

"If love were a mere effort of the will, it might be so. No, Mr. Sully, you are too good, you have been too kind to me, in many ways, for me to deceive you in so essential a point as this. I can never love you as I ought to love my husband."

It was well for Stephen that the obscure light partially hid his face from view.

There was an indescribable change in his voice as he said:

"I am not good. I do not claim to be worthy of you—there are few men that are. But I do claim to love you. Only trust yourself to me, Irva, and I will make you happy, if it is in the power of mortal man to do it! Just think, my dear girl, what you are rejecting, not only a heart devoted to you, but all the ease and luxury that wealth can give. And then, what will people think?"

"What will people think?"

"Yes, what will they think? You came to the city with me; you have been living in a furnished house, of which I am known to hold the lease—for, at Mrs. Sutton's request, I took it off her hands. You have been seen daily in my company. You are too unsophisticated to know, Irva, how very censorious the world is."

Irva turned her flashing eyes upon the speaker.

"You knew!"

"Of course, I knew. But, good heavens! do you think I would have let you compromise yourself thus, had I supposed, for one moment, that you did not understand my intentions, and approve them?"

"I will leave the house to-morrow morning!" cried Irva, rising from her seat. "I would never have come had I known things to be as you have stated!"

"Where will you go? Don't act hastily in the matter. You have no idea what a hard world this is to a girl brought up as you have been, and with neither friends, influence nor money. I forgot to tell you that I wrote to Mrs. Sutton in regard to my love for you. I received a reply this morning, inclosing a letter to you. I beg that you will read it before deciding against me."

Lighting the gas, Stephen placed a chair for Irva near it, and then withdrew to a window, where he stood arranging the folds of the curtain, but stealthily watching her face as she broke the seal of her letter and made herself mistress of its contents.

It looked so pale and troubled before—it was pitiful to see the change half an hour had wrought—that there was no perceptible alteration in it.

Letting it fall into her lap, she sat for some moments with her hand over her eyes.

Then rising, she turned toward him.

"I must have time to think this over. How much can I have?"

"As much as you like. Only don't keep me long in suspense."

"I will let you know to-morrow evening, at this hour."

"Irva."

Irva turned her head, as she stood upon the threshold.

"Don't forget the good you may do me, by consenting to share my lot. No other woman

ever had, or could have, so much influence over me as you."

CHAPTER XII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

IN a maze of doubts, fears and conjectures, now thinking she would do this, and now that, the long day wore to a close.

It wanted only half an hour of the time of Stephen's coming.

Mrs. Haverstraw, who had been with her nearly an hour, warning, coaxing, and expostulating, was gone, and she was alone.

Taking up Mrs. Sutton's letter, she re-read it, and looking over her shoulder, let us see what it contains.

It was as follows:

"DEAR IRVA:—Stephen's letter, confessing the nature of his feelings for you, was a great relief to me. I have worried about you a great deal, lately. As I am unable to give you a home, or do anything more for you, I really didn't know what was going to become of you.

"I did not think it best to tell you your father's name, as it might make trouble, and could do you no possible good, but under the circumstances I felt justified in making a direct appeal to him in your behalf, to which he has not deigned even to reply. So you see there is no hope on that score.

"But you need not care for that, now; Stephen will provide for you better than he, who probably thinks that he has enough to provide for already.

"You ought to consider yourself a very fortunate girl to have such an offer as this. I hope you won't be so foolish as to reject it. If you do, you will have your own way to make in the world, and a hard way you will find it.

"I leave here on the next train. Do not know where I shall be for several months, at least, as I intend to travel.

"You need have no anxiety concerning Barby, who remains much the same, as I shall make her my special care.

Yours truly,

"LUCIA SUTTON."

Irva had wept many tears over the destruction of her beautiful dreams, and which had seemed so real to her, but there were no tears in her eyes now, but a hard, bitter look, that had never been there before.

Her heart rebelled fiercely at the fate assigned her, the hard and stern realities of a life so different from the one she had pictured.

That life of ease and luxury, its giddy round of pleasures, had had an enervating effect upon her, making more gloomy and repelling what she knew must be hers if she rejected the hand held out to her.

As she sat thus, making fainter and fainter resistance against the temptation that assailed her, some one rapped at the door with a message, whose purport she knew before the words reached her.

Irva paused a moment in front of the mirror; wondering if it could be the same face that looked out upon her the evening before, it wore such a different aspect.

As if fearing that her resolution might falter, she went quickly down the stairs, almost startling Stephen by her sudden appearance, especially when he looked into her face.

She went up directly to him, and holding out her hand, said:

"Mr. Sully, I don't love you. I don't think I ever shall—not in the way you love me. But I don't love any one else, and if, knowing this, you care to take me—you can."

Stephen started to his feet.

"Do I care to take you?—oh! darling—"

Taking a step backward, Irva raised her hand.

"Stay! I have not finished yet. You say I have already compromised myself; I will not continue to do so. This sort of life must cease. If you want me, you must take me now."

This was, evidently, something that Stephen did not expect.

"My dearest Irva, it could not be too soon for me; but I have told you how it is with certain members of my family. My sister is so averse to my marrying—"

"Then you must choose between us!" interrupted Irva. "You have called me unsophisticated, and perhaps I am, but I am quick to learn; and I say, and mean it, that our marriage must be now, or never!"

"Then it must be now; for I will not give you up if it separates me from all my kindred! But I am under special obligations to this sister, and would like to give her time to get reconciled to it. I have thought of a plan. Supposing we are married very quietly, taking immediate passage for Europe, to be gone six months, or more? By the time we get back everything will have blown over. I can then introduce you to my relatives and friends. You will do the rest; for they have only to know you to fully

approve of my choice. How does this strike you?"

Standing in the shadow of the bay-window, Stephen watched anxiously the partly-averted face.

"Very favorably. I think I should like to go abroad. And I don't care how quiet the wedding is."

"Thank you a thousand times, my darling!" was the rapturous response. "Then it is all settled. A steamer leaves in three days, whose captain is a personal friend of mine. I will engage a passage for us in it to-morrow. You will need only a traveling-suit; anything else you require can be got much more to your liking on the other side.

"And now!"

Irva submitted passively to the embrace that followed these words, shivering a little as his lips touched hers.

Then she disengaged herself, moving a little way from him.

"You must excuse me now. I did not sleep much last night, and am very tired."

With the exultation that filled Stephen's heart at the success that seemed likely to crown his efforts, was mingled a dissatisfaction that amounted to anger when he remembered the language used by Irva in giving her consent. The indifference she manifested was a sore wound to his vanity; and there were times when he hardly knew whether he loved or hated her most. There was a curious mixture of both in his feelings, that augured ill for the unsuspecting girl, if she fell into the trap laid for her.

"When I get matters into my own hands," he muttered, as he passed down the steps, "my lady will alter a little. Unless I am slightly mistaken, she won't hold her head quite so high."

Mrs. Haverstraw received the intelligence of Irva's decision—to which she had contributed by every argument in her power—with a profusion of congratulations that wearied far more than they pleased the recipient.

"One would almost think it was you that was going to be married," she said, in an irritated tone that Mrs. Haverstraw had never heard from her before. "I almost wish it was. It seems to be the general opinion that there is nothing else left for me to do; and that is all I have to say about it."

There were few points of sympathy between Irva and Mrs. Haverstraw, but so sensibly did she feel her complete isolation from all companionship with her own sex, that it was with a feeling of disappointment that she received her refusal to be the companion of her voyage.

"You will have to have a maid, of course," said that lady; "and I know of one that will just suit you."

Irva had her own thoughts as to this; more—she had a perfect horror of going where she would not see a single face of her own sex that she had ever seen before.

There was something in the kind, honest face of Ellen, the girl that attended to her room, that had always interested Irva. She knew that she did not intend to remain with Mrs. Haverstraw, for she told her so.

"I would much rather have her than a stranger," she thought. "I mean to sound her; and see if she wouldn't like to go with me."

Preferring to do this when they were by themselves, Irva waited until the girl was tidying her room the following morning.

"Ellen, I believe you to be an honest, trustworthy girl, and I am going to tell you something—something that I don't want you to speak of to any one."

"That I won't, ma'am, that you may be sure of."

"Well, I'm going to be married."

The girl looked startled at this abrupt announcement, rather more so than the occasion required.

"It's to a good man, I hope, miss?"

"Yes; that is, I think so. As soon as we are married, we are going a voyage to Europe; and I don't know of any one that I would like so well to have go with me, as my maid, as you."

These words seemed to have a strange effect upon Ellen.

"Beggin' your pardon for bein' so free, ma'am, but it can't be him you're goin' to marry, the man that comes here to see you so often?"

"But it is. Only you must be careful and not speak of it outside. Some of Mr. Sully's friends are opposed to it; so he is anxious to keep it quiet for the present."

"But he can't marry ye—the black-hearted villin! to be decavin' a young, innocent creature like ye! Oh! Miss Irva, darlin', don't trust

him! An' don't let on that I told ye—leastways, not till I git out of the house. If it wasn't fur me month's wages, I wouldn't be here now. Bad luck to the day I come into it!"

"What do you mean, Ellen? Can't marry me!—why can't he?"

"Because he's got a wife already, an' 'twould be rank biggery! He ought to be beaten within an inch of his life fur thinkin' of it!"

The astonishment in Irva's face gave place to a look of incredulity.

"You must be mistaken, Ellen!—it can't be possible! No man could be so cruel as to wrong and deceive me thus."

"Ah! Miss Irva, dear, it's little ye know of the world, an' the bad men that's in it. Plinty of 'em would think no more of doin' that same than of aitin' their supper; the famishin' tiger would show ye more mercy than thim! It's not men, but bastes they are!"

"But, Ellen, Mr. Sully is the cousin of Mrs. Sutton, the lady that brought me up. She never said anything about his being married."

"I know who ye mane, she who come with the poor ould blind leddy. I overheard 'em talkin' together, an' it's my belafe he's not her cousin at all, at all! It's not I that thinks any too well of her, nor of the misthree aither, with all her smooth ways. Mighty thick, thim two wur, as I minded at the time; an' if they didn't hatch up the plot atween 'em, they had a hand in it."

"You might be mistaken. Perhaps it's some other man of the same name that is married, and not he?"

"I couldn't be mistaken. His wife lives in a fine, illegant house in New York. Me own cousin worked fur her, an' that's how I happened to know. I knew his two wicked eyes the first time I opened the door fur him; though he never mistrusted it, fur fine, grand gentlemen like him don't notice the likes of us. I seen him goin' up the steps many's the time, when I was chattin' in the aray with Katy."

"Ellen, this is dreadful!—it is more dreadful than I can express! I must go; I must not stay here another hour!"

Ellen looked pitifully at the pale, scared face that was turned toward her.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Irva, dear; the Lord sinds His angels to purtect thim that's innocent an' helpless as ye. He don't forgit us, even whin we forgit Him, blissid be His holy name!"

This simple faith, so simply expressed, gave another and calmer current to Irva's thoughts; slipping her fingers into that hard, rough hand, she bowed her head upon it, while her heart ascended in voiceless prayer.

"But He expects us to do the best we can for ourselves, all the same," continued Ellen; "an' use the sines He's given us. Ye'll need to have all yer wits about ye in' d'alain' with the likes of thim."

"Do you really believe Mrs. Haverstraw to be a bad woman, Ellen?"

"She ain't a good woman, by no manner of manes, miss. If she was, she wouldn't be afther decavin' a young, innocent girl, that hain't no father or brother to befri'nd or purtect her. It's well enough she knows that the vill'in ain't what he purtends to be!"

Irva shuddered.

"I never liked her—I tried to, but somehow I couldn't—but I never dreamed of this!"

"Take my advice, Miss Irva, dear, an' don't say nothin' to aither of 'em. Don't let 'em have the last suspicion that you've found 'em out. You watch yer chance when they ain't noticin', an' jist walk out, an' don't come back ag'in. There ain't any house very nigh this. It sets back a good ways from the road, and has got a high fence all around it. I can see, by the look in your eye, that you'd like to till the vill'in what ye think of him; but don't do it here, where he has everythin' his own way. I've seen him look at ye, whin he didn't think nobody was mindin' him, an' he won't give ye up 'asy. So mind what I till ye, Miss Irva, an' jist give thim the slip."

"There's the ould harridan's fut on the stairs; if she finds me here, she'll suspect somethin'!"

And away darted Ellen; leaving Irva in a state of mind not easily imagined.

She did not have to feign a headache, to excuse her appearance at lunch; when noon came, her temples throbbed almost to bursting.

As she expected, Mrs. Haverstraw came to the door to see how she was; but on Irva's saying that she was trying to sleep, she went away.

In the course of the afternoon, Ellen managed to smuggle herself in.

"Don't be downhearted, Miss Irva, darlin'."

she whispered; "I hain't furgotten ye. I've got a 'waterproof,' with a big hood to it, that'll cover ye complately from head to fut, an' I'll contrive to smuggle it in to ye as soon as it is dark."

As Irva did not come down to dinner, Mrs. Haverstraw insisted on coming in.

She brought a dish of tea.

"It's a good strong cup, my dear," she said, as she set it down; "and I don't know of anything that's better for the headache, especially for those not used to drinking it."

"How are you feeling? Better, I hope? Stephen will be here this evening, and will be so disappointed in not seeing you."

In spite of all her efforts, Irva shrunk away from the fingers that touched her temples.

"He'll have to be disappointed, then; for I shall not see him to-night."

Mrs. Haverstraw looked at the flushed cheeks and heavy eyes.

"You are looking feverish. I hope you are not going to be sick, at this time of all times. I wouldn't have it happen on any account."

There was a genuine expression of alarm in the speaker's face, as she put her finger on the fluttering pulse.

Irva withdrew her hand; throwing it up over the pillow on which her head lay.

"You seem to take a great deal of interest in me, Mrs. Haverstraw?"

"I do, indeed; almost as much as if you were my own daughter."

"Did you ever have a daughter?"

Mrs. Haverstraw was evidently unprepared for this; there was a sudden change in the voice and face.

"Yes, one; but she died when a baby."

"It would be well for some other daughters if they had died, too!"

A look of sullen gloom settled upon the coarse, heavy features.

"I don't doubt but what it was well for mine. I've often wished I had died when I was a baby!"

Here she forced a laugh.

"But this has nothing to do with *you*, who have such a happy future before you."

As Irva looked into the face of the speaker, the appeal that was quivering upon her lips died there.

"Can I do anything for you?"

"Nothing. All I need is sleep; and I wish you would see that I am not disturbed by any one."

"I will. Lie in the morning as long as you like. You can have breakfast at any hour you want it."

Irva drew a long sigh of relief as the door closed after her; she knew that she would not be intruded upon again.

"You will not find me here in the morning," she thought.

As she lay there, watching the shades of twilight deepen around her, she heard Stephen's ring at the door.

"I wonder if he is going to stay?" was her inward query.

Then, mindful of Ellen's promise, she softly unbolted the door, and waited.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SUDDEN FLIGHT, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

As Irva waited thus, Ellen opened the door cautiously, bearing a server in her hands.

"Here's yer supper," she whispered. "Mind ye don't lave a bit of it; fur ye'll nade all the strength ye can muster."

"Thim two"—here she pointed below—"is going out fur a walk. Thim's yer time. I'll be back as soon as they are gone."

Ellen was as good as her word; returning in a few minutes, with a big bundle under her arm.

"They're gone!" she cried, gleefully. "By good luck, it's cook's afternoon out; so we've got the house to ourselves."

"Here we are!" she added, unrolling the bundle, which resolved itself into a long, shapeless garment, as she held it up.

"Sure, and it's a mile too big fur ye, but it's all the bether fur that. I defy ould Nick, himself, to till who you be whin ye git into it."

Little as Irva felt like mirth, she could not help smiling as she surveyed herself in the mirror after Ellen had buttoned it around her.

"I don't think I could tell, myself," she said, as the girl pulled the hood over her face, in whose dark depths no part of it could be seen.

"It's as complete a disguise as I could ask."

"That it is. If they should chance to spy ye, they'll think it's me. Draw yer hands up into the sleeves; they're so white an' purty they'll

betray ye. Mind an' go down through the garden, out the back gate. Whin ye git over the ferry—ye know where that is—go to me sister's, at twenty-four First strate, up-stairs, an' enquire for Margery Malone. She'll give ye a shelter till ye can do bether. I'm goin' mesilf, as soon as I see you off. I got all me wages this afternoon but two dollars; an' the ould harpy is wilcome to that; she'll need it before she dies if she don't mind her ways. I'd go with ye, but fur fear, if they see us together, they might suspect somethin'. Ye can't miss the way. If ye git puzzled, ask one of the polees—ye'll know 'em by the star on the brist—an' he'll tell ye."

"Now good-by, Miss Irva, darlin'. The Lord bless an' purtect ye!"

Irva threw her arms around the neck of the faithful, warm-hearted girl.

"God bless you! I am sure He will—if it is only for your kindness to one, but for Him, utterly alone and desolate!"

Taking Ellen's advice, Irva passed out the back way into the garden, that covered quite an extent of ground.

She had got near the gate, which opened on another street, laid out, but little built up as yet, when she was startled by the sound of voices, advancing toward her, and which she recognized as Stephen's and Mrs. Haverstraw's.

There was an arbor on one-side of the narrow path, and with a feeling of terror, that can be but feebly put into words, she darted into it, and crouched down into the corner.

To her dismay they came in, sitting down upon the rustic seat near the entrance; but their backs were toward her, and the shadows so deep where Irva lay, that she was completely hidden from view.

They were conversing about her, in low and earnest tones, every word of which was daguer-reotyped upon the brain of the frightened girl, who dared scarcely breathe lest she should be discovered.

Stephen was the first to speak.

"Do you think she was, really, too ill to come down to-night?"

"Yes, I do. You would have said so, yourself, if you had seen her. The truth of the matter is, she has fairly fretted herself sick."

"Not very complimentary to me," said Stephen, with a forced laugh.

"What could you expect? You are more than twice her age, and in no way the kind of man such a girl would fancy. You ought to be satisfied to gain your object any way."

"Now *you* are not over complimentary!"

"I can't help that!" was the sharp response.

"You know, as well I do, that you are no more fit to touch the hand of such a woman—"

Here the speaker paused.

"Do you know, Stephen," she resumed, in a very different tone, "it may seem an odd thing for me to say, after all I have done and am, but I couldn't help pitying the poor child as she lay there, looking as if she had been crying half the day."

"What cursed nonsense is this, Nellie? One would think I was going to murder the girl, instead of giving her a splendid home and every luxury. You are not going back on me, after all I have done for you?"

"It has been pretty clearly demonstrated that a woman cannot go back, whatever else she may do. No, I'm in for it, and will go through with it now. But I wish, on my soul, I never had had anything to do with it! Isn't there plenty of women ye can have—God help them!—that you should take so much trouble to insnare this poor girl, a mere child, and as innocent of all such deviltry as a baby?"

"There is no lack of women," laughed Stephen, "such as they are, but not many like her. With all my experience of the sex, I never loved one of them with so absorbing a passion."

"Faugh! it makes me sick to hear men of your stamp talk of love! You don't know the meaning of the word. You love yourselves. You prize her because she is hard to get. I know you; you'll tire of your pretty toy in six weeks."

"Upon my word, Nellie, you are in a precious queer way to-night," sneered Stephen. "You'll be getting converted next, and leave all us poor sinners in the lurch!"

"You need have no fears of that," was the sullen response; "if a woman gets on the wrong track there is no other way but for her to go straight on, if it takes her to perdition!"

"I love the girl so well, at all events," said Stephen, after a moment's pause, "that I would marry her in *bona fide* earnest to-night, if I were free to do so. As it is, I shall have to go through the farce of it, just to satisfy her."

Marriage is very much of a farce, anyway, according to my way of thinking."

"And who do you count on being so much of a fool as to perform the ceremony?"

"A man by the name of Harvey, at least that is the name he goes by now. He is a renegade clergyman of the Church of England, who committed forgery, or something of that sort, and fled over here. He can be bought for five dollars to do 'most anything. The only trouble is to catch him sober. I'm going to lock him in his room to-morrow afternoon, bringing him round in the evening. So don't fail to let the girl know, so as to be ready."

"You had better caution your man not to make a mess of it. Irva is simple about some things, but she's no fool, and if she has the least suspicion, she'll unravel the whole thing."

Mrs. Haverstraw arose as she said this, and took the path that led to the house.

"Never you fear," said Stephen, as he followed her; "the fellow is well posted, and will do the thing up ship-shape."

Irva waited until their voices died in the distance, before she dared emerge from her place of concealment.

She hurried down to the gate, only to find it locked, it being now past the hour for it to be kept open.

To scale the fence there would be impossible, as it was not only high but of wood, whose smooth surface afforded no foothold; but Irva remembered that the wall on the front side was of rough stone, and which would present no such difficulty.

True, it would be more hazardous as to being seen, but then it would be equally so to linger until her escape was discovered.

Taking a circuitous route, as far from the house as possible, Irva went around to the front side.

Though there was no moon, it was starlight, and finding herself near the main gateway, which was always locked, at this hour, Irva looked cautiously around before attempting what, under ordinary circumstances, she would have considered it utterly impossible to do.

The house could be seen from that point, being on rising ground. Not a movement could be seen around it, and no light within, except in Mrs. Haverstraw's room.

It was evident that her escape had not been even suspected, and taking fresh courage, she commenced the difficult task before her.

After repeated failures, she found herself on the ground on the other side of the wall; though it was only through a strength born of desperation, as her torn and bleeding hands testified.

Perfectly exhausted, she sat down by the roadside.

As she sat there, looking up and down the road, to see which direction she had best take, she saw a man on the other side of the way coming toward her.

With a sudden movement she drew back into the shadow of the wall, but not quickly enough to avoid the man's notice.

"Hallo!" who is that?"

The sound of that voice struck so much terror to Irva's soul that for a brief space she was deprived of all power of motion.

Then perceiving that he was crossing over to where she was, she fled down the hill, in an opposite direction.

The road was dark, rough and uneven; still being very fleet of foot, she might have contrived to elude her pursuer, had it not been for her long outer garment, which stepping upon as she was going at full speed, brought her heavily to the ground.

CHAPTER XIV.

OUT IN THE WIDE WORLD.

WHEN Irva awoke to consciousness, she found herself lying upon a bed, in the same room she had quitted, as she had hoped forever, scarcely two hours before. As slowly it all came back to her; her attempt, its failure, and all it portended, a feeling amounting to despair came over her.

She had supposed herself quite alone, but at the sound of the moan wrung from her lips, a form arose from an obscure corner of the room, and advanced toward her.

As Irva saw who it was, she arose to a sitting posture; indignation sending the blood tingling to her fingers' ends.

"Stephen Sully, what brings you here, into my chamber?"

"Surely, my dear Irva, you are not so foolishly prudish as to refuse to let your promised husband see you when ill?"

Irva was silent. Should she, *dared* she tell him all she knew, and defy him to do his worst?

Mistaking this silence, Stephen continued:

"What madness possessed you to go out masquerading this time of night, in such attire as that?"

Following the motion of Stephen's hand, Irva's eyes rested upon Ellen's torn and drabbed water-proof, that was lying upon a chair.

"I went because I did not wish to make this place my home any longer. All that I ask is my liberty. I am not willing to remain here another night!"

"Why, what has come over my darling? Want to leave me, and on the very eve of our marriage?"

These words, the tone in which they were spoken, were more than Irva could endure. She flung off the hand he laid upon hers.

"Wretch! how dare you speak of marriage to me?—you, who are already married!"

Stephen mistrusted that Irva had heard, or suspected something, but he was unprepared for this.

"Who has been telling you such ridiculous nonsense as this?"

"I heard it from your own lips!"

The astonishment in the eyes that surveyed the speaker, certainly, was not feigned.

"I would not be likely to tell you, even if it were so. It's a lie, whoever told you! I call God to witness that I have no wife, nor will I have any but you!"

"Stephen Sully, God is your witness—and so am I! It is useless for you to attempt to deceive me longer; I was secreted in the arbor, this evening, when you and Mrs. Haverstraw came in, and heard every word that was uttered!"

There was a silence of some moments; during which the consternation that overspread Stephen's face gradually changed to a look of defiance. With his dismay and chagrin at being detected, was mingled a feeling of relief at being able to throw off, in some degree, the mask he had worn.

"Then you know something of what a man will risk to gain possession of the woman he loves. I am not going to take back a word I have spoken. True, there is a woman that the law says is my wife, but it is a title that my heart disowns, and will never give her. To me marriage is something more than the mutterings of priest or magistrate; it is a consecration of the heart. It is you, only you that will ever reign there! I own that I have deceived you; but I plead my great love for you. Can you pardon nothing to love like mine? Listen to me, Irva. She, who is nominally my wife, is a confirmed invalid; I should not be surprised to hear of her death at any time. The moment I am free I will make you my wife before all the world. What else can I do—what more can I promise than this?"

"I would not marry you if you were free to-day, much less be the thing you'd make me! Leave me. You have no right to come into this room. Your very presence is an insult, and your words more insulting still!"

There was a very perceptible change in Stephen's tone and manner.

"I have a right to be here, which even you, haughty as you are, will be forced to respect—the right of the strongest! What can you, a weak, puny girl, with neither friends nor influence, do against me?"

"I am not so friendless or powerless as you think. I have a Friend, far stronger than any earthly king, who will not suffer you to harm me!"

"I think I have heard you speak of Him before," said Stephen, with a mocking smile. "If He cares for you so much, and is as strong as you say, why did He frustrate you in your effort to escape, and let you fall again into my hands?"

"I cannot tell you that. But this I know, if I had left the house as soon as I knew it was in your hands, if I had not wickedly promised to marry a man I could not love, I should now be beyond your power."

"It is too late to think of that now. You are in my power. And it is a power from which you cannot escape; I have taken every precaution as to that, as you will find. Now my pretty birdling, I advise you to be reconciled to your cage, and not beat your wings against the wires any more. I wish to be kind; don't force me to be cruel. A love like mine turned to hate, you will not find a very pleasant thing to encounter. I now leave you, in order that you may have time for reflection. When I see you next, I shall expect to see you in a different mood."

Irva listened to the click of the turning lock, the sound of the retreating steps, joy at her unexpected reprieve overpowering, for a time, the consciousness that she was a prisoner.

But it soon returned with redoubled force, bringing with it the thought of the cruel, the shameful fate that was hanging over her.

But what could she do?

Ellen was gone; supposing, doubtless, that she had made good her escape; and there was no one else in the house with the least disposition to befriend her.

There was no possible way of escape but by the windows, and these were so far from the ground as to make it extremely hazardous for her to make the attempt.

Softly raising one of them, she looked out. As she did so, her eye caught the gleam of the tin-roof of a small wing that jutted out from the main building, directly beneath her.

If she could get down upon that she might manage to reach the ground.

Full of the energy born of this hope, she went to work. Taking the sheets, blankets and counterpane of her bed, she cut them into strips, twisting them into a strong rope of sufficient length, as she hoped, to reach the roof.

Fastening one end of this to the post of her bed, she tied a spool to the other, and wrapping several thicknesses of cloth around it, in order to deaden the sound, threw it out the window, having the satisfaction of seeing it land upon the roof below.

As soon as Irva made sure of this, she put on her mantle and hat, placing in her pocket what money she had, which was only some small change.

Then kneeling down by the open window, she raised her hands to the starry heavens, whose tranquil beauty fell like a benison upon her troubled spirit.

"Father?" she cried, "thou knowest all that awaits me here. By the purity thou hast enjoined upon all thy children, I beseech Thee to aid me!—and if I go not to liberty, let it be to death!"

"Well, do you think the Lord is going to help you?" asked a harsh voice back of her.

Turning, Irva saw Mrs. Haverstraw standing in the middle of the floor, with a derisive look upon her face.

For a moment Irva's heart failed her, then a sudden light broke from her eyes.

"Yes; I think He has sent me help now."

"What help, pray?"

"You!"

"What can move me to help you?"

"The memory of the babe that slumbered on your bosom, and died in your arms!"

It was evident that Irva had found the one vulnerable spot in that hard heart; half-ashamed, half-angry at her weakness, she stood, battling silently with the tender and sacred memories evoked by these words.

"Had she lived, she would have been just about my age; would you be willing to have her given over to the tender mercies of a man like Stephen Sully?"

"I would strangle her first," was the fierce retort.

"But that proves nothing," she added, in a different tone. "If you were out of here what would you do? You have no friends, no home, no money. You can't work; you are not used to it. And if you could, and could find it to do, he would pursue you—blacken your name—turn you from one place and another, until he had hunted you down! I know him—I know them all!"

"I will risk it. All I ask is my liberty. You will help me to it, I know?"

"I dare not. It matters not how, but I am in this man's power. If he finds it out, it will be my ruin."

"But he need never know that you have any knowledge of it. He will see this rope and never think of blaming you."

Advancing to the window, the woman took hold of it.

"Girl, do you hold your life so cheap, your purity so dear, that you dare trust yourself to a thing like this? There is not one chance in a hundred of your reaching the ground alive."

"If there is only one in a thousand, I will take it sooner than remain. All that I ask of you is not to hinder me."

"But I will hinder you! Listen to me. Years ago, when I was as young and innocent as you, a man sought me with fine promises and flattering words. My home was wretched and loveless, and he did not find it hard to lure me from it. Well, it is the old story, old as the hills; in a few months he turned me out to starve, I and my baby—my baby and his! I think my brain went wild, when, denying its paternity, he taunted me with all he had made me! He was flattered and courted; mothers invited him to their homes; vying with each other in trying to

win him for their pure young daughters—while I was kicked down, down! I loved my baby; when it died, all human sympathy for my kind died with it. At least, I thought so. To-night I dreamed of her. I dreamed that she lay in my arms, more fair and sweet than she even was in life; the pressure of her head upon my bosom arousing feelings that I never thought would be mine again!"

Sinking down upon a seat, the speaker bowed her head upon her hands, rocking herself backward and forward some moments without speaking.

Then rising, she dashed the tears, half-angrily, from her eyes.

"Come!" she said, turning to the door; "come quickly, lest I change my resolution. To-morrow I shall scorn myself for this."

With a beating heart, scarcely daring to trust herself to speak, Irva followed Mrs. Haverstraw down-stairs, out into the open air, and along the graveled path that led to the main entrance.

Unlocking the gate, she threw it open.

"Now you are free. I do this for the sake of my baby—the baby I shall never see again, never!"

Irva's eyes were full of tears.

"Oh! Mrs. Haverstraw, don't say that! If you will only try to live a pure, good life, you will surely find her—some day!"

Mrs. Haverstraw's only response to this was to push her through the gate, quickly closing and locking it.

A feeling of joy and thankfulness swelled Irva's heart, as she once more found herself outside those high walls. Whatever else was in store for her, she was free from the deadly peril that had menaced her.

The great world was all before her; she never realized how great until she looked around and thought how small and insignificant a portion of it she was.

The moon had now risen, making everything almost as clear as day.

A turn in the road brought the house she had just quitted into full view.

As Irva looked back she could see not only the open windows of her room but the cord suspended from it, and which showed very plainly against the dark wood-work.

She could not but shudder, as she saw how far from the ground it was, and how small the chance was of her reaching it without loss of life or limb.

Realizing that it must be after midnight, she quickened her steps, directing them to the nearest point where she could take a car for the ferry.

There were few passengers on car or boat, and it heightened the lonely feeling that began to come over Irva, as entering the ladies' cabin she took a seat in the corner of it.

All of her companions were men, which increased her uncomfortable feeling.

She took a furtive look around.

In the opposite corner was a man, whose gentlemanly bearing and frank, honest face, inspired an involuntary feeling of confidence in the beholder.

He looked at Irva, as she entered, with even more than the ordinary interest one might take in seeing a young girl out alone at so late an hour. Something almost like recognition came into his eyes; then, as if convinced of his mistake, he settled himself back in his seat again.

Almost immediately, two men came in and took seats near Irva; very flashily dressed, and who looked as if they had been drinking.

On seeing Irva they winked at each other, and then began to take every possible way to attract her attention.

Not succeeding in their endeavors, one of them said:

"Ahem! are you quite alone, miss?"

Irva's only notice of this was to take a seat on the other side.

Upon which the man nudged his companion, both bursting into a laugh.

This was not unobserved by the man in one corner, who was watching them; into whose eyes there came an ominous flash, but who made no other demonstration.

Poor Irva had now a new trouble and perplexity. The address given her by Ellen, and which was her only refuge, had entirely escaped her memory. It was in vain that she strove to recall it, she could remember neither street nor number.

The boat stopped, and Irva hurried out, anxious to avoid the men, who she saw were bent on annoying her, though she had not the faintest idea where to direct her steps.

Determined not to lose sight of her, the two men pressed on behind; catching up with her just as she crossed over into Fulton street.

"We are going the same way, pretty one, and will take care of you."

Irva uttered a scream as the fellow tried to draw her arm within his.

A moment later, a well-directed blow sent him sprawling into the gutter, while his companion took to his heels.

Leaving him to the mercies of the officer, who now came hurrying to the scene, his assailant turned to Irva, who had sunk down upon the curbstone.

"I trust you are not hurt, madame?" he said, with a courteous lifting of the hat.

Irva arose, with some difficulty, to her feet. The stranger looked into the pale face, turned so appealingly toward him.

"Don't be frightened. The cowardly ruffians have met with their just deserts, and you are quite safe. As it is late for a lady to be out, unattended, allow me to be your escort. What car or stage do you take?"

This was not only a puzzling, but embarrassing question to Irva.

"I don't know. I have forgotten—"

The stranger waited for her to finish her sentence, and then said:

"What part of the city do you wish to go to?"

"God help me!—I don't know that, either!"

The man cast a sharp, inquiring look upon the speaker's face, whose simplicity and innocence rebuked his momentary suspicion.

"If you will tell me where your friends are, I will take you to them."

"I have no friends!—not one in all the world!"

Physical suffering had been added to Irva's mental distress, and now became unendurable.

"I have hurt my foot—and can go no further."

The stranger glanced at the face, that was growing momentarily paler.

"Good Heaven! what a brute I am! Sit down upon this step, and I will get a carriage."

Darting away to the next corner, he returned, saying:

"I have sent for one; it will be here shortly."

Irva's nerves now began to feel the effects of the strain to which they had been subjected during the last twenty-four hours; added to this was the pain of her sprained ankle, and which nearly drove her wild.

He found her sobbing with an abandonment of grief that went straight to his generous heart.

It was a peculiarity of Richard Harrington's that he could never endure to see a woman cry. He could bear any amount of hard words and hard knocks, but tears especially from such a source, to use his own words, "completely floored him."

He had the tenderest, as well as bravest heart in the world.

"Don't! don't! I beg of you," he cried. "You really distress me! You say you have no friends; let me be your friend. My name is Harrington, Richard Harrington, very much at your service. You can trust me; I am an honorable man. Only tell me what I can do for you."

With a strong effort, Irva subdued her sobs.

"Thank you," she said, with a faint smile; "you are very good. All I ask is to be conveyed to some hotel. It must be to a low-priced one, because I have—very little money."

Irva's voice faltered, as she remembered how little.

Harrington went to the corner of the street to see if he could discover anything of the carriage.

"I think I have a better plan than that," he said, on his return. "I engaged rooms and board for a lady, who is not likely to want them. I went to the depot for her this evening, but only to find that she was one of the victims of a terrible railroad accident. The house is very quiet, and kept by a nice old body, one of my mother's family servants. It will be much pleasanter for you there than at a hotel."

"It will, indeed," was the grateful response.

The carriage had now arrived.

Irva made an unsuccessful effort to rise to her feet, the very attempt to put her injured foot to the pavement extracting a moan.

"Don't try to walk; let me carry you!"

And before Irva could remonstrate, if she had felt inclined to do so, those strong arms had borne her to the carriage, almost, it seemed, without an effort.

Richard had the instincts of a true gentleman; he felt the fluttering of her heart, and saw how quickly she disengaged herself from his arms, and as soon as he made sure that she was comfortably placed, he took a seat in an opposite corner.

"Well, this is an adventure!" was his inward reflection, as the carriage drove away. "If any one else had been guilty of such a quixotic act, I should have set him down for a donkey! But

it's all right. What a sweet face she has! I'll stake my life on her purity and goodness."

Then his thoughts reverted to another, and not quite so pleasant channel.

Hannah had one of the kindest of hearts, if it was approached from the right direction; but she had some old-fashioned notions. And the longer he reflected on it, the more dubious he became of her willingness to take into her house a strange lady, of whose very name he was ignorant!

He must ascertain that at all events.

"I have told you my name," he said aloud; "and now you ought to let me know yours?"

It was some moments before Irva replied.

"My Christian name is Irva; there is no other to which I have any right. The one I have always borne, I do not dare to bear any longer."

Richard was more perplexed, as well as mystified than ever. Then a sudden thought struck him.

"Suppose we allow the woman to think you are the lady she was expecting, just for to-night? Her name was Lane. Mine is Harrington. Do you think you can remember?"

"Yes."

The voice was so faint that Richard looked anxiously at the speaker. The light from a street lamp streamed in upon her, revealing closed eyes and a face deadly white.

Calling to the man to drive faster, he lifted the head until it rested against his shoulder, chafing the little cold hands.

In spite of his alarm, a thrill of pleasure stirred Richard's heart as he felt the pressure of the unconscious form, whose very helplessness appealed to all that was manly in his nature. Far from wronging her, even in thought, he felt that he could die in her defense.

As soon as the carriage stopped, he jumped out, and running up the steps of the house it was in front of, rung the bell furiously.

A night-capped head made its appearance from one of the upper windows.

"Is that you, Mr. Richard?"

"Yes. Come down, quick!"

As soon as the woman could slip on a dress, she was at the door.

"It was so late, I'd given up expectin' you."

"There has been a terrible accident on the road, Hannah; a great many killed and wounded. I hope the young lady's room is ready, as she is in a condition to need every care and attention."

Without waiting to hear Hannah's exclamations of astonishment and horror, Richard returned to the carriage, and taking out the limp, unconscious form, carried it up the steps.

"Merciful goodness! is she dead?" exclaimed Hannah, as she caught a glimpse of Irva's face.

"No; she's hurt her foot badly, and fainted from the pain."

Laying his unconscious burden on the bed, Richard rushed for a doctor; Hannah calling after him that there was one next door.

Luckily the doctor was at home, and after seeing him go up-stairs to his patient, Richard waited in the hall, rather impatiently it must be confessed, for it was nearly half an hour before he came down.

He smiled, as he saw Richard's anxious face.

"The young lady has a bruise on her head, and her ankle is badly swollen. I have reduced the latter, and given her a sedative. She will be all right in the morning."

Hannah now made her appearance.

"You had better stop here to-night, Mr. Richard. Now, put down that hat; you're not goin' out at this late hour, while Hannah Prouty has a room an' bed to offer ye!"

The tone in which this was spoken reminded Richard so much of his boyhood, that he could not help smiling as he followed the good woman up-stairs into a room, in whose neat and pleasant aspect evidently she took no little pride, very thinly veiled by an air of deprecation.

"Tain't what you're accustomed to, I know; but I hope you'll manage to make yourself comfortable."

"I know it isn't," said Richard, with a roguish twinkle of the eye. "I've slept most of the time, during the past six months, in the saddle or on the hard ground; but I'll try to get along."

"You used to tuck me in and kiss me good-night," he added, with a laugh. "I suppose I'll have to dispense with those luxuries now? How did you leave the young lady?"

"Asleep. Don't you think she looks young for a governess?"

"I haven't thought much about it," said Richard, rather curtly, who felt that he was getting upon dangerous ground.

Then, not caring to pursue the conversation,

he-laid aside his coat, and began to draw off his boots.

Upon which Hannah vanished with a celerity that provoked a smile from Richard, who was well acquainted with her peculiarities.

As tired as he was, his mind was too excited for sleep.

"I think I'll try a sedative," he said to himself.

And lighting a cigar, he sat for half an hour or more, watching the blue smoke curl over his head, and thinking of his strange, and by no means unpleasant adventure.

How singular it was that one so formed to attract and please should be, apparently, so alone and friendless!

"I have it!" he suddenly exclaimed, bringing his hand down suddenly upon his knee. "I know, now, where I saw her; in that church in Brooklyn, the Sunday I visited George!"

How vividly that scene rose up before him! That dim old church, the crowd of worshipers; and among them the fair, sweet face, that had haunted him ever since—haunted him like something seen in his dreams, he could not remember how, nor where.

And now she was here, under the same roof, thrown so strangely upon his care and protection!

"And I will protect her!" he cried, flinging away the stump of his cigar. "She is a good, pure-hearted girl, whoever she is; and I will be her friend until she gets a better."

CHAPTER XV.

A NEW NAME AND PATH.

WHEN Irva awoke the next morning, it was nearly noon.

As she looked about on her new surroundings, it was some time before she could think where she was, or what had happened.

She stared so wildly into the face of Hannah, as she addressed her by her new name, that had it not been for the smile that followed, the good woman would have feared that her brain was affected.

Irva's limbs felt sore and stiff and her head dizzy; so she was only too glad to drink the nice basin of broth that was held to her lips, and laying her head back upon the pillow, close her eyes again.

Hannah's kind, motherly heart had been won by the first glimpse she had obtained of the girlish face, lying there so white that it almost seemed like death.

She was that real blessing to infirm humanity, a natural-born nurse. Smoothing the rumpled counterpane, she moved softly about the room, reducing to order every disorderly element in it; her very presence diffusing a soothing influence around. And before Irva knew it, she was again in the land of dreams.

This time she did not awake until it was growing dusk.

The thought uppermost in her mind was that she was very hungry. This was almost immediately followed by the appearance of Hannah bearing a tray, whose covered dishes gave forth a very grateful odor.

"Hungry, are ye?" she said, with a beaming smile. "I'm always glad to hear that of them I have the care of; for it shows they're gettin' better. I've brung ye a bit of broiled chicken, a roast potato an' some toast, an' I don't want ye to leave one mite on't."

Lighting the gas, Hannah placed the tray on the small round table by the bed; and then seating herself at a short distance viewed Irva's evident appreciation of her culinary skill with a smile of self-complacency and approval.

"You've done very well," she said, as she surveyed the nearly-empty plates, and speaking very much in the tone one would use to a child. "Now what shall I tell Mr. Richard? He's down-stairs, an' asked me to tell you that he hoped you was gittin' better."

"Say that I am quite comfortable, and very, very grateful to him!"

Hannah was a little puzzled at the warmth of the concluding sentence.

"He hain't done nothin' more'n what 'twas his duty to do," she said, as she turned to the door; "but I'll tell him, all the same."

Hannah gave Richard a minute and very characteristic account of her patient, to which he listened very attentively.

"I'm glad you feel so kindly toward her; she is an orphan, with no home or friends."

"There couldn't nobody help bein' kind to her, I should say!" was the almost-indignant response. "Why, she's the gratefullest little body I ever did see, an' so afraid of makin' the least bit of trouble. To think of her sendin' any such word to ye. As if you'd have left her to perish by the roadside!"

When Hannah knocked at Irva's door, the next morning, she found her up and dressed, to her manifest satisfaction.

"I'm right glad to see you lookin' so much better, though you don't look any too well now. I had my breakfast more'n an hour ago, an' you can have yours here, or down-stairs."

Irva preferred the latter; following her hostess down into a cheerful little room, half dining-room and half sitting-room.

A canary was singing in a cage in the window, and a sleek black cat purring on the sill beneath.

"Here you see my whole family," said Hannah; "Master Dick and Master Jack."

As Irva stood listening to Jacky's song, and stroking the velvety back of his four-footed friend, her thoughts reverted to Barby, and her constant companions, Tip and Johnny.

What would she not give to know how it was with that old and faithful friend!

As Hannah began to lay the cloth for her breakfast, Irva noticed the small size of the table and its appointments, which could not have seated comfortably more than four.

"I thought you kept boarders?"

"No, only lodgers. I like them a deal better. They all have business outside; going away in the mornin' an' not comin' back till night. No, I told Mr. Richard I'd take you, the short time you was goin' to stay in the city, but I wouldn't make a practice on't for no money. Not that I'd mind it so much if they was all as nice an' quiet as you be. But the majority on 'em ain't, not by no manner of means. I had enough of that sort of thing when my poor dead-and-gone husband was 'live. When a body has got to my age, and worked hard all ther life, they want a little rest an' quiet."

Hannah paused a moment, but only to take breath.

"Your breakfast will be ready in five minutes. I didn't make the coffee, because I wanted it to be fresh. Here's the morning's paper, with all about that dreadful accident in it. Curious enough, they've got your name in the list of the killed. I told Mr. Richard that he orter have it corrected, but he said as how 'twas no manner of use; them pesky newspaper men was so pig-headed an' contra'y that they never would own they was mistaken 'bout anything. Very unaccommodating of 'em, to say the least."

Irva shivered as her eye fell upon the name of the ill-fated lady, into whose place she had so mysteriously stepped. What a terrible fate for one so young! Yet it was a question if she were not the most fortunate of the two.

Her grave look was not unnoticed by Hannah.

"You've had a very fortunate escape, Miss Lane."

"I have, indeed!" echoed Irva, who had more cause for gratitude than Hannah supposed.

While she was breakfasting, Hannah was summoned up-stairs by the ringing of the door-bell, returning in a few minutes.

As soon as Irva rose from the table, she said: "Mr. Richard is up-stairs, in the parlor, waiting to see you."

Hannah noticed the agitation that Irva vainly strove to subdue, with some surprise, though ascribing it to the shock her nervous system had received.

"He ain't in no hurry. I told him that you was at breakfast; an' he insisted that I shouldn't tell you till you had finished."

Had Irva been a royal princess, Richard could not have bowed over the hand she extended to him with an air of more respect. He saw the doubts and misgivings so plainly visible in her constrained manner and varying color, and hastened to reassure her.

Leading her to the sofa, he wheeled an easy-chair in front of her, and sat down; a proceeding that served to still her fluttering nerves and put her more at ease than anything he could have said.

Irva remembered what he said to her on the night of their first meeting: "You can trust me, I am an honorable man," and as she looked into those honest blue eyes, she felt that he spoke truly.

In order to invite her confidence, Richard told her all about himself. How he was an orphan, whose nearest relatives were two sisters, one a half-sister, several years older than himself.

He told her about Hannah, who had lived with his mother until her marriage; relating various anecdotes illustrative of her kindness of heart and good commonsense; displaying such a fund of kindly and honorable feeling himself, that before she was aware of it, Irva was talking to him as freely as if she had known him all her life.

Richard suddenly checked the tide of his reminiscences.

"Now, let me hear a little about you. To commence at the beginning, how are you feeling?"

Irva's cheeks flushed.

"Very much as if I were a ship, sailing under false colors."

"Ah! well: we'll fix that all right."

Then catching the questioning look in the shy eyes that were lifted to his, he added, with a laugh:

"Miss Irva—you told me that was your name, I think—you look at me as if I was an ogre. Now, in spite of my six feet of stature, and ferocious appearance, generally, I do assure you that I am a most harmless fellow."

"I don't think you the least bit of an ogre," smiled Irva. "On the contrary, I find it impossible to express my appreciation of your generous and noble conduct."

Richard's face lighted up at this praise, which sounded very sweet to him.

"Show it by trusting me a little."

Richard looked at the face, whose varying color showed the conflict that was going on.

"Don't think that I want to pry into anything that you wish to conceal. Only if there is anything that you would like to tell me, I pledge myself to regard it as a most sacred confidence; giving you all the counsel and assistance in my power."

It was some moments before Irva spoke, and when she did, it was slowly and with hesitation.

"I have little to tell, and that little is not pleasant to speak of, or remember. I am a worse than orphan; my mother died when I was a baby—my father I never saw. I was called by the name of the woman who brought me up, but to which I have no just claim. I dare not bear that name any longer, because I have an enemy, a bad and cruel man, from whom I wish to escape. Pray do not think me ungrateful, but I cannot, dare not tell you more!"

"You need not; I will not ask you another question. I said what I did, hoping that I might be able to serve you."

"The only way by which you can do that is to obtain me some kind of employment."

Richard glanced from the small hands to the face, which, with all its delicacy of outline, had a certain air of steadiness and resolution.

"Have you ever taught any?"

"No; but I think I could, if the pupils were not too far advanced."

Richard was silent, and Irva continued:

"If you knew of any place, I should be so glad. I would be content with very small salary."

"A stranger would find it next to an impossibility, without credentials."

Irva's countenance fell.

"The place with my sister, that Miss Lane, poor thing, was to fill, is now vacant, and would just suit you."

"Would she take me without references?"

Richard knew what a careful mother his sister was.

"Could she have an opportunity of knowing you, she would trust you I am sure. Supposing you go and make a trial of it. My sister has never seen Miss Lane, and knows nothing of her death."

"Without letting her know who I am!—would that be right?"

"I don't think it would be wrong—under the circumstances. I don't mean, of course, to continue the supposition, but only for a few weeks, until you have had time to win her confidence, as you will be sure to do. You can then tell her how it is. Or, if you would rather not do so, I will look around, in the meantime, and find you some other opening. There is no possible chance for detection, as the lady whose name and place you take had no relatives except a younger brother, who was adopted by a man out West. As for wronging my sister in any way, I secure for her children a good governess, and that is all she requires. You will not find your duties hard or irksome. My sister is a thorough lady, in every sense of the word, and will do everything to make her home pleasant to you. There are only three children, the oldest not ten yet, very quiet and well behaved."

"I have no doubt of its being a desirable place, and no fears that my duties will be too hard."

"Then leave the rest to me," interrupted Richard, gayly. "My shoulders are broad enough to take all the responsibility. If anybody is blamed, I will take especial pains to see that it falls on the right party."

"Now, my dear Miss Lane—that is your name now, you know—I want you to consider me the

big brother you had forgotten you had, and who would only be too happy to be of service to you."

The tears sprung to Irva's eyes.

"I wish you were!"

The honest fellow's face flushed at the strong protest his heart uttered against this wish.

"As children say, 'let us make believe,' that it is so. And in that relation, permit me to remark, as it was the intention of Miss Lane, that was, to do some shopping in the city, perhaps Miss Lane, that is, would like to do some, also. In that case, I hope she will allow me to be her banker; with the proviso, however, that she repay me when her first quarter is due."

Irva felt the thoughtfulness and delicacy of these words.

"I think I have a way of obtaining all I shall need. To show my appreciation of your kindness, I promise, in case I am mistaken, I will let you know."

"Now remember. In the meantime, I will write to my sister; mentioning the accident, and the delay it has occasioned, and making everything clear and straight for you."

The resource to which Irva alluded was the chain, from which was suspended the locket containing her mother's picture.

On returning to her room she examined it. It was heavy and of solid gold, and must have cost considerable in the day of it.

The jeweler to whom she applied offered her twenty-five dollars, less than half its worth; but it was more than Irva expected, and it was very gladly accepted.

On her return she found a trunk in her room, on which were the initials of her new name.

In the bonnet-box was a brown straw hat, trimmed with velvet of the same color, and a long, drooping feather; much handsomer than she would have thought of buying.

In another part of it were gloves, handkerchief and various other articles of feminine apparel.

Irva knew, in a moment, who they were from, but when Richard came in the evening, and she taxed him with it, half-reproachfully, he made strange of the whole affair, declaring it to be a mystery too deep for him to fathom.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT HANNAH THOUGHT ABOUT IT.

It was finally settled that Irva should wait a week longer than the time at first decided upon, so that Richard could accompany her.

"I want to see sister Kate and the babies," he said. "And then it will be better, taking everything into consideration, that I should go with you."

Richard often took tea at Hannah's during this interval, and was invariably there every evening.

He always had some ostensible errand.

"I only ran in for a minute," he would say, laughingly.

But Hannah noticed that his minutes were remarkably long ones, stretching themselves into an hour, at the shortest.

She was very shrewd and sharp-sighted, and began to feel a little uneasy at two young people, each so formed as to please and attract the other, yet so different in position, being thrown so much together.

She always used a great deal of freedom in speaking to Richard, treating him very much as she did when he was boy, and which, as it amused him, he had encouraged.

One night she followed him out onto the steps.

"You were always fond of me, Mr. Richard," she said, dryly: "but there never was a time before that you couldn't exist without seeing me twice in twenty-four hours!"

Richard colored.

"What foolish notion have you got into your head, now?" he laughed.

"Mind that you don't get foolish notions into somebody else's head."

"What do you mean?"

Hannah looked up into the big blue eyes, which had the same honest look that they had when he was a boy.

"I know that you wouldn't do nothin' wrong, Mr. Richard, not if you knowed it; but young men is so thoughtless. Miss Lane is a nice little body; I never took so to any one before on such short acquaintance. An' she's pretty, there ain't no denyin' that. An' I'm glad to see you kind to her. You orter be kind to all sech; help-in' them all you can, in their own life an' way. But you an' she can't never be more to each other than you be now. An' 'tain't no real kindness for a man in your position to pay a girl in hers too much attention."

Richard listened to this with a visible impatience, that almost amounted to anger.

"What nonsense! Hannah. To hear you and my sisters talk, one would suppose I belonged to the blood-royal, instead of being an American-born citizen, penniless, but for the bounty of my uncle, who may leave his property to some one else, as he has a perfect right to do. Miss Lane is my equal, in every respect, and the man will be fortunate that wins her. Not that I suppose that she has for me any other than the kindly feeling she would naturally entertain for one who has honestly tried to serve her."

"You mustn't think that every one sees me through your partial eyes," he added, his manner regaining its usual air of careless good-nature. "I really am not so dangerous a fellow as you imagine. Good-night."

Irva, who was standing near the open window of the room above, could not help hearing much of this.

She smiled, as she thought of the little likelihood there was of her forgetting their relative positions.

"I shall not forget, either," she thought, "how much I owe to him. How kindly and generously he spoke of me, my brave defender! Happy the woman that wins such a true and loyal heart. It certainly will not be a friendless, nameless girl like me."

There was a certain something in Irva's manner, gentle as it was, that deterred Hannah from giving her any intimation of her fears. But in their frequent talks, in the long afternoons when Irva brought her sewing down into the sitting-room, she contrived to drop various hints which she thought would serve to put her on her guard.

She was very fond of the Harrington family, with whom she had spent her younger days. It was easy to perceive that Richard had always been her favorite, and many were the anecdotes and incidents that she had related to Irva concerning him, all of them of a nature to increase her admiration of his character.

Hannah was not slow to notice the unconscious interest Irva took in all that related to him, and she now changed her tactics.

"Mr. Richard was educated by a rich and childless uncle, who sets all the world by him," she said, the next afternoon, as they sat sewing together. "So do his sisters—I think I never see sisters more attached to a brother than they be. They all count on his making a high marriage."

Hannah glanced over to where Irva was sitting, as she said this, but whose deepening color alone showed that she heard it.

"Miss Ida Weston is goin' to be the fortunate lady, by all that I can hear," pursued Hannah, tearing off another breadth of the dress she was making. "She isn't rich, but she's of a high family. Mr. Richard's uncle and Judge Weston graduated at the same college, and were always great friends. Miss Weston is very handsome an' stylish-lookin', as well as highly connected. She was on here, last winter, a-visitin' his sister, an' I mind that Mr. Richard was mighty attentive."

Irva made no reply, and Hannah did not pursue the subject further.

The good woman's conscience pricked her a little; for she knew that Richard paid Miss Weston no more attention than one of his kindly nature would naturally pay to his sister's guest.

"I mean it for her good," she said to herself. "If she has got any sech notion into her head, an' they should find it out where she's goin', 'twould be jest the wust thing that could happen to her; an' it's only a kindness to give her a leetle warnin'. I don't exactly like the way he looks at her, or the way she colors up when he speaks. But I don't believe there's any danger. I've watched 'em when they didn't think I was nothin', an' I couldn't see nothin' more'n common. He treats her as if she was a queen, an' she ain't the least mite forrerd, I'll say that fur her!"

Irva's simple preparations were soon made. She got herself a brown traveling-suit, just the shade of her hat, with gloves to match, in which she looked very nicely.

Richard glanced approvingly at her costume, as he entered the room where she sat waiting for him.

There was not a bit of color about her except in her cheeks, and these were as bright as the bunch of roses he handed her.

"All ready, I see. Then we'll be off directly, as we have only just time to catch the boat."

There were actually tears in Hannah's eyes as she followed them to the door.

"I declare, I shall be lonesome enough now!" she said, as Irva bid her good-by.

"I am really getting jealous of Miss Lane," laughed Richard; "you never put such a long face as that on whenever I went away!"

"Be sure you come an' see me whenever you come to the city!" called out Hannah, as they went down the steps.

"Of course she'll come," said Richard, looking back; "I shall bring her myself."

"What a nice-looking couple they be!" thought Hannah, as she looked after them. "It almost seems as if they was made for each other. But, lawful sakes, his uncle would never consent in the world, an' as fur Miss Janey an' Miss Kate, they'd go distracted at the very thoughts on't."

In less than half an hour Richard and Irva were steaming up the Hudson.

It was a beautiful day, and they remained most of the time on deck. It was the first trip Irva had had up the river, and everything was new and delightful.

With Richard, it had lost the charm of novelty, but he took great pleasure in pointing out to Irva the beautiful residences and places of note by which they passed. Indeed, he felt that it was, by far, the pleasantest trip he had ever taken, ending all too soon.

"We are nearly home now," he said, with a half-sigh; "it seems as if we had come in half the usual time."

"Yonder is Forest Hill," he added, pointing to a house perched upon a rocky eminence far above their heads. "We have to pass it to get to the landing."

It was likely to be her home for some months, at least, and Irva surveyed it with no little interest.

It looked very solitary, with no habitation anywhere near it.

Perhaps this thought was visible in Irva's countenance, for Richard said:

"You cannot tell much about it from the river. On the other side the ascent is so gradual as hardly to be noticed, and the country roundabout very beautiful. My sister spends most of her time there, on account of the children. But coming from the city, I fear, at first, it will seem rather lonely to you."

"I do not like the city, and am very, very glad to leave it."

As Richard looked at the speaker he remembered what she had told him.

Who could be an enemy of one so gentle and good?

They had now touched the dock.

Beside a low, open carriage stood a colored boy, his glistening teeth very apparent in the smile that broadened his face.

"There is Jack waiting for us," said Richard.

"This way, Miss Lane."

"How do you do, Jack? All well at the house?"

"All very well, I thanks you, Mr. Richard," responded Jack, with a low bow.

Richard assisted Irva in, taking the reins into his own hands.

"I'll drive, Jack; you can ride back on the express."

"All right. I've got to stop for the mail, anyhow. They told me to come for the young lady, but they didn't nobody say as how you was comin', Mr. Richard."

"There didn't any one know it. I thought I'd take them by surprise."

Richard had spoken truly; the scenery which lay on each side of the winding road that led to Forest Hill was very beautiful, and a calm, restful feeling came over Irva as she looked around.

"You like it?" said Richard, who had been quietly watching her.

"Yes. I have spent most of my time in the country; and it seems like getting home."

"I knew it," thought Richard, his mind beginning to be lost in a sea of conjectures as to how one, manifestly so unused to the world, should be thrust so entirely upon it.

A sudden turn of the road brought the house into view, on the broad piazza of which a lady sat reading.

Two children were chasing each other over the lawn.

As soon as they saw Richard they set up a loud shout.

"There's uncle Dick, mamma!"

The lady threw down her book and was down to the carriage almost as soon as they.

"Is this really you, Richard?"

"This is really me," responded Richard, returning the kiss that was given him. "I've not come alone, you see. Miss Lane, this is my sister, Mrs. Vernon."

There was an expression of surprise in the

lady's eyes as she turned them upon Irva, who evidently did not look at all as she expected.

Mrs. Vernon was a small, fair, pleasant-looking lady, who looked young to be the mother of the children who were clinging to Richard's hands.

She received Irva very kindly.

"I hope you have fully recovered from your injuries, Miss Lane. We were greatly shocked to see your name among the killed, and very much relieved when we got Richard's letter."

Irva was too truthful and conscientious not to feel keenly her false position. The color came and went, and there was such a confused feeling in her head that she dared not trust herself to reply, except by the simple expression of her thanks.

Perceiving her embarrassment, Richard now interposed.

"Miss Lane is not very strong as yet, and I take the liberty of suggesting that she be shown directly to her room."

They had now reached the house, and touching the bell, Mrs. Vernon consigned Irva to the care of the colored girl that answered it.

"How different she looks from what I thought she would from Rev. Dr. Quinlan's letter," said Miss Vernon, as she looked after her.

Richard, who had the youngest of the little Vernons clinging to his neck, suddenly put her down, and stood up.

"What kind of a description did he give of her, pray?"

"I don't know that he gave any particular description, only I gathered from it that she was older, and not so—so pretty."

Richard's spirits suddenly rose.

"Young and pretty, what a terrible misfortune!"

"You may laugh, Dick," said his sister, a little gravely, "but it is a misfortune for a girl in Miss Lane's position to be so pretty."

"Position! I wonder if there is a word in the English language that you and Janey have so often on your lips?"

"I wish you thought of it a little more," was the reproachful response.

"I wish I did," said Richard, dryly; "especially when I have so much to boast of. I think our maternal grandfather was a shoemaker!"

This was a sore subject with Mrs. Vernon, as her brother well knew.

"You will be always bringing that up, Dick; when you know as well as I do that grandpa never worked at his trade since we can remember."

"I beg your pardon, sis, but grandpa Baker made me my first pair of boots; and nice ones they were! I am really proud of the old man. And I know another thing; that father was never sorry he married the shoemaker's daughter. Now tell me honestly, Kate, would you exchange her for Janey's?"

Kate thought of what she had heard about her father's first wife.

"Well, no. Still it would be very nice if our mamma had been as rich as Janey's."

"So she could have made her daughter as rich. But she wasn't. So while Kate Harrington was married for love, Jane Harrington was married for her money. Poor Kate! fortunate Janey!"

Kate laughed.

"You know I don't think any such thing, you provoking fellow! I wouldn't take Janey's husband for all her money. But for all that, money and position are good things to have, and you can't persuade me to the contrary."

"I don't wish to. I only want you to realize that there are some things worth more than either."

Richard now commenced a series of gymnastics with little Ada, who was pulling impatiently at his hand, and which ended in his perching the delighted child on his shoulder.

"I saw Dr. Quinlan's name among the passengers on that fatal train. I suppose that there was no mistake about his death?"

"I think not. By the way, Kate, Miss Lane's nervous system has received quite a shock, and if I were you I wouldn't ask her anything about the accident. I don't suppose she knows any more about it than you have seen in the papers. She is an orphan; coming here among entire strangers, and I feel sure that my sister will do all she can to make her comfortable."

Kate had no small share of the fund of good feeling that made her brother so believed by all who knew him; though it was considerably modified by her different training.

"Of course I will. I have given her the east room, opening out of the school-room, one of the pleasantest in the house. You haven't seen the school-room since it was altered. I've had the windows cut down to the floor that look out

upon the garden, and you don't know what a difference it makes."

With one child on his shoulder, and the other two clinging to his coat, Richard followed his sister into the school-room, whose pleasant appointments and deep, low windows, fronting to the east, gave it a very cheerful and sunny aspect.

He listened absently to Kate's talk of all the trouble she had to get things to her liking. As his eyes rested upon the chair in front of the baize-covered desk, his thoughts reverted to its probable occupant.

Then aloud:

"It, really, is a great improvement, Kate. I don't see how it could be altered for the better."

CHAPTER XVII.

SUDDEN SUMMONS AND A HASTY FAREWELL.

"ONE letter for you, my dear, and two for Richard," said Mr. Vernon the next day, as he looked over the evening mail.

Mr. Vernon was a nice, fresh, young-looking man, in spite of the incipient baldness that was such a source of anxiety to his wife, who was devotedly attached to him. Indeed the love that these two had for each other was something very pleasant to contemplate.

Kate read her letters with a pleased smile upon her face.

Then she came over to where her brother was sitting.

"I have good news for you, Richard. Who do you think is coming to visit us?"

"Janey?"

"No; Janey is coming, but not now. It is the young lady you took so much interest in last winter. How stupid! Can't you guess?"

"My dear Kate, you will have to tell me. I always was stupid in guessing riddles. I really can't seem to recall any young lady in whom I took any particular interest."

Kate looked almost provoked.

"Why, Miss Weston, to be sure."

"Oh!"

"Yes. And I'm so glad on your account, Dick. I was telling John, last night, that I was afraid it would be dull for you."

"Thank you. What with your society and the children's, riding, rowing and fishing, I think I should find life endurable, even without the charming addition you mention."

"Then you don't really care for her coming?" said Kate, in a disappointed tone.

"I can't say that I do, particularly."

"Don't look so sober, Kate," he added, smiling back upon her from the open doorway.

"You ought to consider it a compliment that I prefer your society to that of this brilliant belle and beauty."

Kate looked after him, with a half-sigh.

"I wonder if he never means to marry," she thought. "He's twenty-four and past. I wouldn't mind it so much, if it wasn't for the fear of his making a *mesalliance*, which I dread above all things, and which he is just the man to do. I wish he would take a fancy to Ida. They would make such a splendid couple. And then I should know he was safe. I know she likes him."

"Miss Weston will be here on the evening boat," said Kate, the next morning at the breakfast table, speaking to her husband, but looking over at Richard.

"Well, who is going after her? that is the next thing to be considered," said Mr. Vernon.

"I am," said Richard.

Kate's face brightened.

"I wish you would, Richard. I know Ida would rather have you than any one."

"I am not so sure of that; but I'm going, all the same."

When Irva entered the school-room that morning, she found a lovely bouquet on her desk.

There had been one there the preceding morning. Supposing it to be an offering from one of her pupils, she made no comments on it except to praise its beauty. Now she said:

"Which of you brought me those beautiful flowers? Was it you, Harry?"

"No, ma'am."

"I know!" cried Ada. "'Twas uncle Dick; I see him."

"Little tell-tale," said a voice at the door.

Turning, Irva saw Richard.

"Good-morning, Miss Lane. Am I intruding?"

"Not in the least! You have been here before, I perceive," added Irva, pointing to the flowers.

"I need not ask how you are in health," said Richard, his eyes resting admiringly upon the radiant face, whose color glowed more brightly as he gazed. "But as I was the means of your coming, I feel anxious to know if you find your

home pleasant here, and if every one is as kind to you as I could wish?"

"It could hardly be more pleasant. And every one is as kind to me as even you could wish, who have been the kindest of all."

"And you do not find your pupils troublesome, I hope?"

"Not at all. They are very good children, and I am beginning to love them dearly."

"I am glad to hear that, very glad, on your account, children. Because if you are not studious and careful not to make your teacher trouble, I shall take her back to New York. I brought her here, and I shall claim the privilege of taking her away."

Richard did not look at Irva as he said this.

In the silence that followed he moved toward the door.

"How long do your duties confine you here?"

"From nine until three."

"Then, with your permission, I will come again about four, to have a frolic with the children, and bring you a new book I have been reading, and which I think will interest you."

Richard was as good as his word; his appearance being hailed by the children with a shout of joy.

Placing a chair for Irva on the grassy terrace that ran beneath the low windows, he gave her the book, pointing out some passages in it that pleased her.

He paused a moment, to look into the eyes raised so serenely to his. Then he turned to the children that were impatiently waiting for him.

"Now I will relieve you, for a time, from these torments."

The shouts and laughter of the children brought Kate out on the lawn.

Perceiving Irva, she came up the steps of the terrace, and seating herself on the top one, began to inquire about the children; a fruitful theme with her, for she was a thorough mother.

As they sat chatting, Richard came up.

"Don't forget about going to the boat, Dick. I told Judy not to have tea until after it was in."

Then to Irva:

"We are expecting a young lady friend to spend a few weeks with us; Judge Weston's daughter, of New York."

Irva made no reply, but she remembered what Hannah had told her.

It was true, then.

Irva had hitherto dined with the family, taking the rest of her meals with the children. The day after Miss Weston's arrival Richard missed her from the table.

He said nothing; but about sunset, seeing Irva in the garden, he went down to her.

"Not seeing you at the dining-table, I feared you were ill?"

"Oh! no. I told Mrs. Vernon, whenever there were strangers at the house, that I preferred to dine alone."

"I missed you. But if it is really pleasanter for you to stay away, I am content that it should be so."

Irva looked at the speaker.

Did he, really, miss her, or say this as a simple matter of courtesy and good feeling?

Miss Weston saw them from her window. She regarded Richard as her exclusive property, and as she marked his attentive air, and saw how pretty his companion was, she experienced a feeling of jealousy.

"Who is the young lady I saw in the garden with Mr. Harrington?"

Kate glanced up from the worsteds she was sorting.

"Young lady in the garden? Oh, it must be Miss Lane, the governess."

"I thought her face a rather pretty one, from the view I had of it."

"I think it might be called very pretty. What do you call this, blue or green?"

Miss Weston would certainly have called it green, had it been any transcript of her mind. She made no further inquiries, but she decided to watch the pretty governess.

Irva took no inconsiderable interest in her, though it had a very different source.

"I hope she is worthy of him," she thought.

The nearest view she had, thus far, obtained of the new-comer, was when she rode past the window one morning with Richard. But she saw enough to convince her that Hannah was right in calling her "very handsome and stylish-looking."

One day the two were brought quite unexpectedly together.

Irva was out walking when she saw Richard and Miss Weston approaching in an opposite direction.

She would have retreated could she have done so with any dignity; but, as it was, she had no

alternative but to walk straight on in the narrow woodpath that was before her.

Richard came to a full stop; lifting his hat with the courtesy that was habitual to him.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Lane. Miss Weston, let me make you acquainted with Miss Lane."

Miss Weston gave Irva a short, haughty nod, who shrunk abashed at the cold, curious stare of the bold black eyes that were fixed upon her.

Pausing no longer than was absolutely necessary, Irva passed on.

Anxious to atone for the rudeness of his companion, Richard hastened after her, and opening the little gate just beyond, stood with his head uncovered until she had passed through.

Provoked at being left for one that she considered so much beneath her, Miss Weston stood biting her lips with ill-concealed rage.

Richard did not take the arm he had dropped, but walked beside her in grave silence.

"Upon my word, Mr. Harrington," she said, with a forced laugh, "you show a great deal of gallantry to a nursery-governess!"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Weston; it is my aim to treat every lady with courtesy, and Miss Lane is such, in every sense of the word."

As Miss Weston glanced up at the speaker she saw that she had made a great mistake. Angry at herself, she was still more angry with the innocent cause.

"The low, presuming nobody!" she exclaimed, as soon as she had regained her own room.

"To think of her daring to stand between me and the man I love. The sly, artful baggage! she just throws herself in his way. It was a preconcerted plan her meeting us as she did, and yet how surprised and confused she pretended to be, just to enlist his sympathies. He's interested in her, that's easy to be seen, if no more. But I will spoil the game she is playing. I'll open Mrs. Vernon's eyes to what is going on, who don't seem to have the faintest idea of it."

Miss Weston's chamber was a corner room, on the second floor; having a full view of the school-room and the grounds around it.

The next day, just as the sun was setting, she came down from her chamber, and out upon the piazza where Kate was sitting.

"The school-room and the grounds around it seem to be a favorite resort to Mr. Harrington. I notice that he is there every afternoon."

There was something in the tone in which this was spoken that made Kate raise her eyes inquiringly to the speaker's face.

"Yes; Richard is quite fond of the children. And they are quite as fond of him."

"Judging from appearances, I should say he was more fond of their pretty governess."

This was a new and most unwelcome idea to Kate, as her changing color testified.

Miss Weston continued:

"I have been watching them for the last half-hour from my window. He reading to her out of a blue-and-gold book—Byron, I suppose. It is, really, amusing!"

The laugh that followed these words was a very discordant one, and as Kate raised her eyes to that dark, lowering face the thought crossed her mind that she might not be so desirable a wife for her brother as she had supposed.

The tone was a little cool in which she said:

"Richard is not a great lover of Byron. I think you do him injustice. He is too honorable to trifle with any woman; serious intentions he could not have. Any notice he takes of Miss Lane springs from his sympathy with her lonely condition. He has one of the kindest hearts in the world."

"Yes; and that makes it all the more dangerous for him to be subjected to the arts of a bold, designing woman."

"I have always thought Miss Lane to be very modest and retiring."

"There is just where she hoodwinks you so nicely. I've had my eye on her for some time and you'll rue the day she ever came into the house, now you mark my words!"

Here they were interrupted.

Kate was much more disturbed by what Miss Weston told her than her words indicated. She had the strongest confidence in as well as love for her brother, and her heart revolted at the idea of the necessity of any surveillance; still she determined to keep her eyes open, and to have a confidential talk with Richard at the earliest possible moment.

The next morning Richard entered the breakfast-room with an open letter in his hand.

"I have a letter from uncle Charles, Kate, asking me to meet him in London on the twenty-third. He is going to make a tour of Germany, and wants me to go with him. What do you think of it?"

Kate was silent for some moments, her face very grave.

"I think if he wants you to go, you ought to do so."

"I think so, too."

There was another silence; this intelligence casting a damper on all present.

"The steamer City of New York, leaves tomorrow morning," said Mr. Vernon, looking up from his paper.

"That is the one that I want to take," said Richard.

There was no more said; both brother and sister seemed very much preoccupied. Richard hurried through his breakfast, leaving the room immediately after.

He looked back upon his sister from the threshold.

"In order to catch the express, Kate, I must leave in half an hour."

Miss Weston went directly to her room.

"I knew it, she said, as she saw Richard crossing over to where Irva stood by the open window, looking out upon the garden. "He has no thought for me; it is all for her—her!"

Almost wild with rage, jealousy, and despair, the speaker stamped her foot upon the floor, the black, straight brows nearly meeting over the eyes.

"He shall not find her here when he returns—not if I can prevent it!"

In the meantime, Richard had taken both Irva's hands in his.

"My dear Irva, I have just received news that compels me to start for Europe, to be gone several months. It comforts me to think that I leave you so pleasantly situated. I have something to tell you—something which I feel ought not to be so long delayed, but I must write it. Now I have only time to say good-by, and God bless you!"

A warm, lingering pressure of the hand, a look that haunted her long after, and he was gone.

It had come upon her so suddenly that she had sat like one stunned. Now tears came to her relief; tears that had in them something of sweetness as she recalled the tenderness of those few parting words.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BAD NEWS.

As strongly attached as Kate was to her brother, she was not sorry to have him go. She could not but own that Irva was very attractive, and that Richard was fond of talking with her.

"It is only a fancy," she said to herself, "but serious things grow out of such, sometimes. He will forget all about it before he comes back; and then travel will be beneficial to him in other ways. Miss Lane suits me; she is so devoted to her duties and the children so fond of her, that I should feel sorry to have to send her away."

"My sister, Mrs. Sully, will be here tomorrow."

That name sent a sudden shiver through Irva's veins.

As soon as she could command her voice, she said:

"It is late for city people to come to the country."

"Yes; but Janey's doctor ordered her to the sea-shore during the hot weather. I hope we shall have pleasant days yet."

"Is her husband coming with her?"

"I think so. John, is Stephen coming?"

"He said he was coming for a few days. To be honest, I had just as soon he wouldn't."

"Oh! John, you must try and make it pleasant to him, for Janey's sake."

"If Janey had the sense she was born with, she'd have left him long ago!" growled Mr. Vernon in a tone Irva had never heard him use before.

But she scarcely heeded it. It was well that the gathering twilight hid the pallor of her face, as leaning her head upon the pillar of the porch, she struggled against the sickening feelings that came over her.

It was *him*! She had hoped that it was some one else of the same name. What was she to do now? Oh! if Richard were only here!

But she was all alone; there was no one to aid or counsel her.

One by one the stars came out, looking down upon her from their azure thrones. The moon arose from behind the distant hills, flinging a silvery halo over the peaceful scene that had been such an Eden of rest to her.

Must she leave it, going out into the wide world again, with which she was so unfitted to cope? Or should she stay and fight it out—fighting this bad man with his own weapons—

even if conquered, suffering no ignoble defeat? She did not close her eyes in sleep that night until she had decided which of these two things she would do.

Irva did not have to feign a headache the next morning, to account for her pale cheeks and heavy eyes.

She attempted to dress, but her head was so giddy that she was obliged to lay it back again upon the pillow.

As soon as Kate heard of it, she came in to see her.

Irva protested that she needed nothing but rest and quiet; so Kate darkened the room, and went out again, taking the children to the other part of the house.

She did not try to rise again until evening, and then she did not leave her room.

She heard the merry voices of the children, as they got into the carriage that was going to meet the boat.

Almost immediately after it had gone, Judy came to the door with her supper, saying:

"You hain't eat nothin' to speak of all day, honey, an' I's afeard you'd faint away if you waited till the rest on 'em had theirs."

Irva sat with the untasted supper before her until she heard the returning wheels of the carriage.

Going to the open window, she listened. Amid all that medley of voices, very distinctly came to her strained ear the smooth, bland voice that she so well remembered.

He had come, the man she so dreaded—cruel and pitiless in his love as in his hate.

The battle of life had commenced again; and she must have strength to fight it.

Returning to the table, she broke her long fast. Then disrobing, she laid her weary head upon the pillow, falling into a deep, unbroken slumber.

Near the middle of the forenoon, Irva heard steps along the corridor which led to the school-room door.

Then Kate's voice, saying:

"Miss Lane, my sister, Mrs. Sully. Don't let us interrupt you. I only wanted to show her the school-room."

Irva glanced up at the face she so well remembered, simply bowing in reply to that pleasant salutation.

She was sitting with her back to the door, but she knew that Stephen was standing on the threshold—knew it by the oppressive atmosphere he always brought with him, even if she had not heard his voice.

He was gayly talking with Miss Weston, who was in better spirits than she had been since Richard left.

The two moved slowly past her, down through the room.

Irva felt the eyes that were fixed upon her, but she did not turn her head, or lift her eyes from the book that was lying open on the desk.

She heard, as in a dream, Mrs. Vernon explaining the improvements to her sister. Attracted by the voice, Irva glanced up at the face of the latter, long enough to see that the eye and mouth had a resolute though pleasant expression.

The two sisters moved back to the door; Stephen and Miss Weston remaining by the window, their gay words and laughter filling the room.

Mrs. Sully turned round as she reached the threshold.

"Come, Stephen; you are disturbing Miss Lane."

"I beg Miss Lane's pardon!"

There was an almost imperceptible emphasis on the words italicized; clearly perceptible to Irva, however, and just as clearly understood.

She heard the closing door with a feeling of relief that was indescribable. It seemed as if she could not have borne the tension upon her nerves one minute longer.

Would he betray her? Knowing all she could tell concerning him, would he dare to do so?

She had gathered from words dropped by Mrs. Vernon that her sister's property was settled on herself, and that her husband was, in a measure, dependent upon her.

"Did you say this young lady's name was Lane?" inquired Stephen of his sister-in-law, as they passed beyond hearing.

"Yes."

"It strikes me that I have seen her before. Where is she from?"

"Massachusetts. Her father was old Deacon Lane of Scarborough. He left two children; one, a boy, two or three years younger, cousin Henry Burt took with him out to Quincy, Illinois."

"And this is the daughter?"

"This is the daughter."

This was not unnoted by Miss Weston.

"Where did you see this girl?"

Stephen looked a little startled at this abrupt inquiry, especially as he saw the look of intense interest and curiosity in the eyes of the speaker.

"I thought I saw her in New York; but as it is another name, I conclude I must be mistaken."

Miss Weston was far from satisfied.

"I believe they have met before," she said to herself; "there was such an astonished expression in his eyes when he looked at her, and she behaved so oddly! There is a mystery about that girl; and I'll find it out before I am many weeks older."

CHAPTER XIX.

STEPHEN HAS HELP FROM AN UNEXPECTED QUARTER.

The next day was Sunday.

Mr. and Mrs. Vernon were very regular in their attendance at church; and the day being fine, the large carriage was got out to accommodate all desirous of going.

Irva had never missed one Sabbath; generally preferring to walk in pleasant weather, it not being much over a mile to town, but to-day she decided to remain at home.

Soon after the carriage had gone, she saw Stephen come out upon the lawn. As he walked up and down, smoking, she observed that he cast many a curious glance at the window, by the closed blind of which she stood.

As unpleasant as an interview would be, Irva felt that it would be better that they should have an understanding, in order that she might know what to expect.

She would not seek him, but she resolved to give him an opportunity to speak to her, if he chose to do so.

Opening the window, she stepped out, walking slowly down the path until she came to a tree at the lower part of the garden.

As soon as Stephen saw her, he threw down his cigar, and first making sure that there was no one around, walked toward her.

Irva stood with one hand resting on the tree. She heard his step, but did not move until he was within a few feet; then she turned her head and looked at him.

Stephen raised his hat with an air of mock respect.

"Good-morning, Miss Sutton. To find you here, in this beautiful retreat, is a pleasure that I little expected."

"The pleasure is entirely on your side."

"How cruel! Especially considering the abrupt manner in which you left me, Miss Sutton, or Miss Lane, which?"

"Whichever you choose. Still, I think it only right to tell you that your course will determine mine. I have, as yet, said nothing in regard to our acquaintance, not supposing that you would care to have your wife—or sister, which?—know of the deception you practiced, or the wrong you meditated."

"She won't believe you!"

"She will believe me. She knows enough about you to believe every word of it."

This was a shot that went straight home, as Stephen's changing color testified, and Irva took courage.

"I am not sure but what I ought to tell her, anyway; still it is not my intention to do so unless you render it necessary. But I shall defend myself, you may be sure. Let me hear the slightest word or hint to my discredit, and I will not keep silent."

"You are making a great fuss about a very small matter. If you prefer the name of Lane to Sutton, or wish to ignore our former acquaintance, I don't know why I should interfere, and I have no intention of doing so."

"You will do as you like, of course. All I have to say is that I will keep silent if you do, but not one moment longer."

Stephen returned to the house in quite another mood from which he left it.

He could not but own that he was quite as much at Irva's mercy as she at his; that he had given his wife strong reasons for believing the story she could tell.

Having dissipated his own property, he was entirely dependent upon her liberality; and the thought that she might follow the advice of certain of her relations, and leave him, was not very pleasant to contemplate.

He met Miss Weston at the door, who had been watching them from her window.

"So you are bewitched with the pretty governess also. Your cousin and brother-in-law seemed to have no thought for anyone else when he was here."

Stephen glanced keenly at the speaker. The

feeling that Miss Weston had evinced toward Irva had puzzled him, now it was clear.

"So Richard was in love with this girl?"

Miss Weston's long-repressed feelings found vent in words.

"If there is any meaning in looks, he loved her! I was nothing more than a stock or stone in his sight, if she was by! It is useless for you to try to deceive me; I saw you when you first met, I watched you talking together in the garden. You have met before; you know something of her that none of us know here."

"It is not always safe to tell what we know."

"It is safe with me. I will not mention your name, or let any one know where I got it."

Stephen was silent for some minutes; his eyes fixed upon that eager, passionate face, as if trying to see how far he could safely trust her.

"I will be frank with you; we have met before; I do know more of her than any one knows here. But you know how jealous Janey is of me, as it is, and I dare not speak of it."

"I understand you; but you need not fear that I will get you into any trouble. Tell me something—give me the merest clew, and I will work it out for myself, and nobody will be any the wiser."

Again Stephen studied the face of his companion; many conflicting thoughts passing through his mind.

To his dislike of his brother-in-law was added the fiercer feeling of jealousy. He burned to punish and humiliate the woman that had repulsed and defeated him, and, if possible, get her again into his power.

To this was added the cowardly fear, if Irva was allowed to remain in her present position, she would say something that his wife would hear. If he could lower her in the estimation of the family, so that her word would be discredited, he would be safe.

These thoughts passed with lightning rapidity through the mind of the man, who never had an unselfish one in his life.

"You would like to send this girl away in disgrace?"

"I would give half my life to do it!"

Stephen looked at the speaker, smiling, as he thought how adapted to his purpose was the tool that was put into his hand.

"This is one of the providences that pious people talk about!" was his inward jeer.

Miss Weston continued:

"I hate her! She has wiled away from me the only heart I cared to possess; and if it is in the power of mortal woman to drive her away in disgrace, I'll do it."

"I will place in your hands the means to effect this, if you will pledge yourself not to let it be known that I had anything to do with it?"

"I promise."

"Come into the library."

The two were closeted in the library nearly an hour.

"He will not dare to say anything," thought Irva, as she returned to the house.

But this elation was followed by a sense of depression; a feeling she had often had of late.

Never did she feel so painfully the false position in which she had placed herself—its wrong, as well as its danger. She had never intended to remain in it so long; but the more she saw of Mrs. Vernon the more she was convinced that nothing could induce her to place her children under the care of any one that could not furnish the strongest testimonials; that all her habits and modes of thought would make it very difficult for her to perceive any excuse for the deception she had practiced.

With all these new complications, to make any confidante of her now was out of the question, but she resolved to leave at the expiration of the quarter, and seek some other situation, however hard and unpleasant it might be.

CHAPTER XX.

MISS WESTON'S TRIUMPH.

ON the following Wednesday Stephen returned to New York, leaving his wife with her sister.

Two weeks later, as Mr. Vernon, Mrs. Sully, Miss Weston and Kate were together in the common sitting-room, a card was handed to the latter.

"Lane—George Lane," she said, looking at it with a puzzled air; "I don't know any one with that name. Do you, John?"

"No, my dear," said Mr. Vernon, returning the card to his wife. Perhaps it is some relative of our pretty governess?"

"Did he inquire for me, Maggie?"

"Yes, ma'am, very pertic'ler."

"Show him in here."

The young man that entered was not over twenty-two, but the cool, calculating look in his

face made him seem much older, while his manner, though quiet, showed that there was little danger of any under self-estimation.

Kate arose on his entrance.

"I am Mrs. Vernon."

The stranger bowed; not the faintest approach to a smile disturbing the gravity of his face.

"I am George Lane. I have been given to understand that my sister, who I supposed was killed on a railroad collision, is living in your house in the capacity of governess?"

Kate smiled; her kind heart warming at the thought of the pleasure in store for the lonely girl—

"You are right; she is here. It is not strange that you supposed her killed, for it was so stated in the paper."

"You will pardon me, madame, but I must consider it not a little strange that she should have left me so long in ignorance of this error; leaving me, in fact, to find it out by the merest accident."

It did strike Kate as very odd, but ever disposed to look at the sunny side of things, she said:

"Very likely her letters miscarried. At all events, she will be delighted to see you. Will you go to the school-room, or shall I send for her?"

"With your permission I will see her here. Be good enough to simply send for her, and no more."

Inwardly wondering, Kate gave the message to a servant, couched in the terms requested, and returned to her seat.

There was something so odd about the stranger, his manner, his sudden appearance, and all, that he became an object of curiosity and interest to all present.

He seemed the most unconcerned one of the group.

On looking around his eye fell upon Miss Weston, who was sitting in the recess of the bay window, bowing in response to her gracious smile of recognition.

This completed the general wonderment.

Kate broke the awkward silence, by saying: "I judge it to be some years since you have seen your sister, Mr. Lane?"

"It is six years since I was East, madame. I should have come on when I heard of the accident, but I was very ill at the time."

At this moment Irva entered.

The stranger looked steadily and curiously at her, but gave her no sign of recognition.

Irva glanced quietly around, and then turned her eyes expectantly upon Kate, who smiled as she met that questioning look.

"Has your brother altered so much that you don't know him, Miss Lane?"

The stranger now spoke:

"That woman is an impostor, madame; she is not my sister!"

The mine had exploded so suddenly beneath her feet, that for some minutes Irva stood motionless, staring blankly into the stern face of her accuser, who now arose to his feet. Then she said, addressing her words to Kate:

"The gentleman speaks truly; I am not his sister. Ever since my stay here I have borne a name to which I am not entitled, and allowed you to suppose that which is not true."

In spite of those crimsoned cheeks and faltering voice, there was a certain dignity in this frank avowal that was not without its effect upon those who heard it, though it varied with each one of them.

Kate was a devoted mother; and the thought that she had intrusted her dear babes to the care of one of whose antecedents she knew nothing, threw her into a state of alarm and indignation that quite transformed her.

"Upon my word! this is a very cool confession, Miss—whatever your name may be! I should, really, like to know your motives for practicing such a deception as this?"

As Irva lifted her eyes she met those of Miss Weston fixed full upon her, gleaming with scorn and triumph.

"If you wish to know my motives I will give them—but not here."

She then turned toward the stranger.

"Aside from disclaiming any thought or intention of giving you pain or trouble, I have only one thing to say. I know not only the name of your informant, but his motives, and I wish you to tell him that as he has not kept his promise, neither shall I keep mine."

Miss Weston now stepped forward.

"He?" "him?" she sneered. "You are altogether too hasty in your conclusions. I was his informant!"

"You?"

"Yes, I. I suspected you to be an adventu-

ress from the first; and various things that came to my knowledge confirmed this suspicion. I wrote to Mr. Lane; and this is the result."

The tone, even more than the words, stung Irva from her self-control.

"I am no adventuress! but, with the exception of this error—for error I admit it to be—as true and pure a woman as any here. Some day you may be thrust out into the world as I have been, and know what a hard world it is."

Irva went straight to the school-room.

As she stood at the desk, taking some papers from it, Mr. Vernon entered. He was an easy-tempered man, by habit and inclination averse to the task before him, a task that was not made any easier by the face that was turned toward him.

"Miss—ahem!—I suppose, as a matter of course, that you would not care to remain with us any longer."

"Nor do I suppose you would care to have me."

"Well—ahem!—we won't discuss that point. Mrs. Vernon requested me to pay you the quarter's salary. You will find it correct, I think."

Irva handed back a portion of it.

"The quarter has not expired yet; I can take only what is due—if anything is!"

Mr. Vernon had just come from listening to an excited colloquy between his wife and Miss Weston in regard to the enormity of Irva's conduct, and in whose feelings he had shared, to a certain extent, but there was something in this involuntary admission, coupled with the dejected look and attitude, that caused a sudden revulsion to this.

"I think you may count on the whole amount being fairly earned; I have heard Mrs. Vernon speak often of your faithfulness to your duties and kindness to the children."

The quick tears sprung to Irva's eyes.

"Thank you for saying that! Still"—here a shadow fell across the face—"under the circumstances, I would not take anything for my services if I were not compelled to do so."

"If you wish to return to New York, there is a train that leaves at half-past seven. But if you prefer to wait and take the morning boat—of course you will do so. The carriage will be at your disposal at any time you name."

"I will leave to-night. Please convey my thanks to Mrs. Vernon for the kindness with which she has treated me. I might say something in palliation of what she so justly condemns, were I at liberty to do so. But it would only occasion fresh trouble. So I will only ask you both to think as kindly of me as you can."

Mr. Vernon returned to the room where the three ladies were still sitting.

"I've done it, Kate; but I hope you won't give me any more such commissions. It's rather rough on a woman to turn her adrift without any warning, and who has, perhaps, no place to go to."

"Such as *she* find plenty to care for them!" said Miss Weston, with a toss of the head.

Mr. Vernon gave the speaker a look, not over complimentary, could she have rightly interpreted it.

"She is not a bad woman, if *that* is what you mean; I know enough of the world to be able to assure you of that."

"What did she have to say for herself?" inquired Kate.

"Not much of anything. She hinted at some palliation, or object, but did not state what."

"Of course she had an object!" said Miss Weston, with a meaning glance at Kate.

"I couldn't understand what she said," pursued Mr. Vernon. "I wish you would have a talk with her, Kate; she leaves on the evening train."

Kate's usually clear perceptions were entirely clouded by the fears engendered by Miss Weston's insinuations.

"I shall do no such thing, John!" she said, in an excited tone and manner that her husband had never heard her use before. "You ought to be ashamed to ask such a thing of me! When I think of the danger to which the dear children have been exposed—and when I think of Richard, and all that might have happened, if he hadn't been called away so suddenly, I don't know how to contain myself! But it is always the way, with *you men*, you can never see anything bad in a pretty woman!"

Mr. Vernon wilted at the insinuation conveyed by these words, which, to do him justice, no man deserved less than he.

"Very well, my dear; you will do as you like, of course. It is only another proof that woman is the hardest of all against her own sex."

Mrs. Sully had kept silent, thus far, though not a word or look had escaped her notice. Now she spoke:

"There are some exceptions to that rule—many, I hope; and I am among them. This girl is no adventuress. She has the beauty that too often arouses the jealousy of our sex and the lawless passions of the other, but whatever errors she may have committed, no one can look into her face, or watch her, from day to day, as I have done, and not feel that she is innocent at heart. I mean to have a talk with her."

There was an uneasy expression in Miss Watson's eyes, as she looked after her.

"What do you suppose she means to do?" she said, in a low tone, to Kate.

"I don't know," returned Mrs. Vernon, looking a little disturbed at her sister's sudden exit. "Janey is so odd, saying and doing what no one else would think of."

Mrs. Sully went directly to Irva's room, whose surprise was clearly visible in her eyes as she opened the door.

"I beg pardon if I intrude, but I thought that perhaps you might like to see a friend?"

"I beg your pardon, madame, if I seem ungrateful and discourteous, but none of your name can ever be such to me."

Mrs. Sully was prepared, in a measure, for this repulse, and the calm friendliness of her look and manner did not alter.

"Are you sure of that?"

"Quite sure. I know how kind and good you are, and am sorry that you should have to think so ill of me, but it cannot be helped. All I can say in explanation is, that I was thrust out into the world, with neither friends or anything to help me. It was open to me to come here, in the way that I did come, and I yielded to the temptation. It was a great mistake."

"We all make mistakes. The whole life of some is one long mistake. At least it seems so here; how it may look to us in the Hereafter, we cannot tell. If you have made a mistake, all you have to do now is to learn the lesson it teaches. Be careful that you do not make another by rejecting the hand extended to you."

"I reject it in no unfriendly spirit. Our ways lay different. It must be so; it cannot be otherwise."

"I am a wealthy, childless woman; by reason of ill-health, much alone. I need some one to sit with, talk and read to me. From what I have seen of you, I think you would suit me. Will you come?"

"Strange, ungrateful, and even rude as it may sound to you, sooner than come into your household in any capacity I would do the most menial labor that can be imagined."

Contrary to what might be expected, Mrs. Sully evinced no displeasure at this.

She surveyed Irva with an interest beneath which lay some strong feeling, though of what nature it was impossible to say.

"Did you ever meet my husband before you saw him here?"

Irva stood motionless, the color coming and going in her cheeks, as though inwardly debating what she ought to say.

"Why do you ask that?"

"No matter; I do ask it."

"Before I answer, I must ask you a question. Did he, your husband, have any thing to do in bringing upon me this new misfortune?"

"If you refer to Mr. Lane's discovery of your assumption of his sister's name, Miss Weston asserts that no one had any hand in it but she, and all I can learn confirms her statement."

"Then I cannot tell you. Believe me, dear lady, it will not make you any happier to know; and I entreat you not to question me further."

"I will not; there is no need. There is only one way by which I can help you. Are you going back to New York?"

Irva was silent.

"My child, what can I say that will induce you to place some confidence in me? Do you think I would betray you, or do anything to make your hard life harder?"

"No, no! I did not, could not think that! But I thought, perhaps, you did not understand—"

"I understand more than you think—more than I wish I did—God help me!"

Irva looked at the pale face, which bore traces of mental, as well as physical suffering.

The eyes that met hers were full of tears.

"Child! do you envy me? With all the poverty and loneliness, that makes your heart so heavy, would you exchange your lot for mine?"

"God forbid!"

"We must each bear our own burdens, making the most of them that is possible. I would gladly help you, if you would let me. If you were going to New York I might be able to do so."

"I am going there."

"Then, if you are in want of shelter or a friend, go to St. Mark's Hospital, and inquire for Sister Millicent! I will give you a line to her."

"Now, one thing more. Have you sufficient confidence in me to follow my advice in one instance, and without asking any questions?"

"I have."

"Then leave here half an hour earlier than you intended, and instead of going directly to the station, go to the hotel—you know where it is, just opposite the post-office—and, engaging a private room, remain in it until I see you. Will you do this?"

"I will."

CHAPTER XXI.

CHECKMATED.

"I, REALLY, wish I knew what to do," said Kate, in a tone of perplexity that made her husband glance over at her from the top of his paper.

"Do about what?"

"Why, with this letter to Miss Lane, as we always called her."

"I should say that the only proper and honorable way was to give it to her."

"But it is from Richard. I know it by the handwriting and postmark."

"I don't see what that has to do with it."

"Of course you don't!" returned Kate, with an irritation born of the conflict that was going on in her mind. "You can't see any harm in Richard's corresponding with such a woman, but I do! It's my belief that she came here for the express purpose of entrapping him. And she would have succeeded if he had stayed much longer."

"Well, my love," said Mr. Vernon as he looked at his wife's flushed and perturbed face, "if I were in your place I wouldn't worry about it. You are not individually responsible for Dick. He's old enough to take care of himself, I should say, if he's ever going to be."

"Some men never are, if they live to be gray-headed!"

"Or bald-headed," said Mr. Vernon, slyly, raising his hand to the spot about as large as a half-dollar in the midst of his luxuriant locks.

"You can laugh, John," replied Kate, smiling herself a little at this suggestive action, "but I do feel worried about it, especially now that Richard is coming home."

"Is Richard coming back?" said her husband, his thoughts taking an entirely new direction. "I thought he was going to be away several months."

"That was his intention; but it seems from his letters that uncle Charles has received some news that compels his immediate return. That is what Richard writes; uncle Charles is so eccentric that it's just as likely to be a freak of his as anything."

"Now I think I will beat a retreat," laughed Mr. Vernon, moving toward the door; "when you begin to abuse uncle Charles, there is no chance for a sinner like me!"

Miss Weston was present during this conversation. She now approached Kate.

"Do you know what I would do, if I had that letter?"

"Keep it, I suppose."

"I would do more than that; I would read it."

Kate's honorable nature recoiled from this suggestion.

"Nothing could tempt me to do that! The utmost I could think of doing would be to retain it; and I don't know as I ought to do that. John thinks that I should give her the letter, and I believe I will."

"You are too late in your decision," was the quiet response; "I saw the carriage go down the avenue ten minutes ago."

The feeling of relief in Kate's heart was plainly visible in her face.

"If she is really gone, why, of course, there is nothing more to be said or done."

As soon as Mrs. Sully had made sure of Irva's departure, she ordered her pony chaise, with which she was accustomed to drive about, and set out to the village.

She went directly to the post-office, carefully scrutinizing the faces of the few loungers that stood around the door as she entered.

Like the majority of such in small places, it was located in a country store, a corner of which was boxed off, and dignified by the name of post-office.

The proprietor knew Mrs. Sully by sight. He was a man who prided himself on his affability, especially to the fair sex.

"Good-afternoon, Mrs. Sully. Your husband is in town again, I see."

"Is he?" was the unconcerned reply.

"Yes; I saw him at the depot not fifteen minutes since."

"I think I saw him this morning," said the son of the postmaster, who was sitting at a desk in the inclosure.

Without making any comments, Mrs. Sully took the mail-matter that was handed her, and went out.

Leaving her carriage there, she crossed over to the hotel, and was shown to the room where Irva was waiting for her.

"Are you willing to trust me still further?"

"I am."

"Then do not go by rail. At the lower landing is a small boat called the Firefly. It is a freight boat, but it sometimes takes passengers. You had better go by this boat; it will be best and safest. Do you understand me?"

"I think I do."

"That is sufficient. Your baggage has not been taken from the carriage, I see. That is well, as you have no time to lose. I am acquainted with the captain of the boat; mention my name to him, and he will give you every attention. Here is a letter to 'Sister Millicent,' of the Sisterhood of St. John, a Protestant order. You can trust her. It is her holy mission to be a friend to the friendless, and she will be a true and kind friend to you."

Mrs. Sully waited until the carriage was out of sight. She then drove to the depot.

It was a small, low building, as is generally the case, situated in the least pleasant part of the village.

There were a number of people on the broad platform, waiting for the evening express, that would soon be due.

Glancing around, she passed on to the open doorway, just within which stood a man with a slouched hat drawn down over his face, the collar of the closely-buttoned coat being turned up so as to nearly meet it.

He recognized her, but whether she did him was a matter of doubt, as could be seen by the involuntary drawing back into the shadow.

But it was a doubt that was soon dispelled.

"Stephen!"

Not all Stephen's power of dissimulation could give the semblance of any thing like pleasure to a meeting so unexpected and undesired.

"Why, Janey! what brought you out such a chilly evening as this?"

"I suppose you are just as much surprised to see me?" he added, in a lighter tone.

"On the contrary, I expected to see you."

"Why?"

"For two reasons. The postmaster told me you were here, for one."

"And the other?" said Stephen, with an outward smile, and an inward anathema at that individual's officiousness.

Janey looked at her husband, so steadily that his eyes wavered, and then dropped her own to the floor.

"And the other?—we will not talk of that just now."

"I just run up on a little business. I should have come up to the house, if I had not expected to return on the next train."

"What business?"

"Oh! well, about a horse that Will Marsden has, and that I want to swap for my gray. But couldn't induce him to accept my terms."

"I shouldn't suppose you could. Will Marsden must be more than three hundred miles from here by this. He started for Colorado, yesterday morning."

"How stupid!—I meant his brother George."

"His brother George went with him."

There was not much that could confuse Stephen, but at this his face reddened, and for a time he seemed at a loss what to say.

Janey's countenance did not alter. There was no gleam of mirth or triumph in the sad eyes that surveyed the sullen face, out of which the flush of shame had not yet faded—a shame that had in it no touch of remorse.

This was the man she had vowed at the altar to love and honor! Love him, she did not; honor him, she could not. But who was to blame for that broken vow?

How plainly all the evils of his evil life were written upon his face, changing its every expression and outline.

Never did she feel so palpably the gulf that lay between her soul and his, and which was widening daily.

In the meantime, Stephen was keeping a keen, though quiet, outlook. Not a person entered the room, or left it, unnoticed by him. He was manifestly impatient to rid himself of his companion.

"My dear Janey, the air is getting too cool and fresh for you. Let me put you in the carriage."

"Thank you; I'm in no hurry."

Just then a shrill whistle came from down the river.

Janey took out her watch.

The "Firefly" had left the dock, and was on her way to New York.

A minute or two later the express train came in, and the two went out upon the platform.

They stood there silently until every passenger was aboard.

Then Janey said—quietly, as though in response to something from him:

"She is not here, you see."

Stephen changed color.

"She?—who? What do you mean?"

"I mean the young girl you were watching for; my sister's late governess."

"What new vagary have you got into your head now?"

"Nothing new, unfortunately. But we will not discuss the subject in so public a place. The train having gone that you were so anxious to take, and left you behind, perhaps you will accept my sister's hospitality for the night, and a seat in my carriage?"

Stephen followed his wife to the carriage without speaking.

He would have assisted her in, but she forestalled him, and, gathering up the reins, waited for him to take a seat by her side.

In the meantime fears and conjectures were busy in his heart.

He stole a furtive glance at his wife; but her face, though a trifle paler, looked much the same.

Was this mere suspicion on her part, or had Irva betrayed him?

He knew enough to understand that she had circumvented and baffled him.

How he hated her!

"I could kill her!" he said to himself, in a rage, more fierce and deadly because he dared give it no outward expression. "And I believe I shall, some day."

They were approaching a rude bridge across a deep, dark ravine. He could hear the water gurgling over the jagged rocks, a hundred feet below.

The impulse came strong upon him to fling her over it.

"You can make it appear to be an accident!" suggested the devil, that was busy at his heart.

Just before the fore-hoofs of the horse struck upon the bridge, the slender hand tightened upon the reins, and the docile creature stopped.

"I think I ought to tell you"—how calm and clear that voice rose above the tumult that raged within—"I think I ought to tell you, Stephen, that I have made my will; and that you will not be benefited by my death. On the contrary, the annual allowance that you have hitherto had from my estate will be lessened one-half. Go on, Charlie."

In obedience to that gentle command, Charlie trotted over the bridge, and down the steep declivity that led from it.

Stephen's heart almost stood still.

Did she suspect his murderous intent, and say this to show him its folly?

"I believe she's in league with the devil!" was his inward ejaculation.

Then aloud:

"You have the right to do what you will with your own property."

"Only so far as I have the will to do what is right."

"One would suppose, however, that your husband had as much claim upon you as any one."

"One would naturally suppose so, yes."

Stephen studied his wife's countenance for a moment.

"It is easy to see that you have been listening to lying stories about me, Janey. Because I haven't always done right, it don't follow that I'm guilty of everything that's laid to my charge. The girl you alluded to is a mere adventuress, as can be proved—"

"Stop! Stephen; I will not hear you blacken the name of an innocent girl, and simply because she is innocent. She never told me one word; all I know I have obtained from other sources. I heard, before I came up here, of the young girl you put under the care of a certain woman in Brooklyn, and the deception you practiced on her. I had no idea of her identity with my sister's governess until the day you met. Your words, your manner, aroused my suspicions, which further developments strengthened to certainty. More than that, I am convinced that there was some understanding between you and Miss Weston, else why were you at the depot, on the watch for her?"

"I was not on the watch for her. Though I don't suppose it is any use for me to deny it, or any of the rest of your charges."

"Look back upon the past, and ask yourself if you have given me any reason to rely upon your word."

Stephen made no reply to this. He was evi-

dently alarmed at his wife's discovery; this alarm being based on the most selfish and mercenary considerations.

There was silence between the two, until the carriage turned from the public road into the broad avenue that led to the house.

Then Janey spoke.

"Stephen, for ten years you have been my husband only in name. When I first discovered your unfaithfulness to me, I virtually separated from you, as you know. Still, I did not deprive you of that for which you alone sought; my hand; all these years you have enjoyed a liberal allowance from my estate. Aside from this, I have paid your debts many times; I have overlooked your frequent infidelities, your shameless disregard of all truth and honor. Because I retained any lingering spark of the love I once had for you? I tell you, no! Because I entertained any hope of your eventual reform? Any such hope as that died long ago. It was simply to keep you from rushing from bad to worse, and from worse to utter ruin. When I am convinced that the means afforded you are only an instrument in your hands for inflicting further wrong upon yourself and others, that will cease, also, and our separation will be complete."

There was no opportunity for Stephen to reply, if he had felt inclined to do so. When his wife ceased speaking, they came into full view of the piazza, on which Kate and Miss Weston were standing in the bright moonlight.

The former came running down the steps.

"Why, Janey! I was getting worried about you. And Stephen—I didn't know you were expecting him?"

"I think Janey must be gifted with second-sight," said Stephen, with a constrained laugh. "I sent her no word, for the simple reason that I did not know it myself, until just before I started. But she was promptly on hand, which I consider very fortunate, as it saved me quite a walk."

It is said that "liars should have good memories." Stephen forgot what he had said about returning on the next train, or rather remembered it too late.

Janey noted it; but she was too much accustomed to these prevarications to feel any surprise; she certainly manifested none.

She simply said:

"I consider the strong premonitions I had that I should find you there, as very fortunate—very fortunate indeed."

CHAPTER XXII.

ACROSS THE OCEAN AND BACK AGAIN.

WE will now transport the reader across the ocean to a London hotel, where, beside a cheerful fire, sits a man not more than sixty, though his white hair makes him look some years older.

The table, beside which he sits, is strewn with papers and letters.

He has an open letter in his hand, whose worn envelope is covered with postmarks, and in whose contents, and the thoughts to which it gives rise, he is so much absorbed as not to notice the entrance of a younger man, an old acquaintance of ours, Richard Harrington.

"Well, uncle, everything you mentioned has been attended to, and we bid fair to start on our trip to Germany to-morrow morning."

"My dear boy, I regret giving you so much unnecessary trouble, but I am going back to the United States by the next steamer."

Richard glanced from the excited face of the speaker to the letter he still held in his hand.

"You have no bad news, I hope?"

Mr. Cameron handed the letter to his nephew.

"I don't know, as yet, whether it be good or bad."

Richard read the letter, which consisted of only a few lines, through twice. There was a look of pity in the eyes that he lifted to those fixed so intently upon him.

"What do you think of it?"

"If you hadn't had so many such letters—"

Here Richard paused, unwilling to destroy the new-born hopes that had sprung up in that desolate heart.

"But this is different from any of the others. Here a name and positive address are given. Don't you see?"

"It will do no harm to go there at all events. God grant that you may not be disappointed."

"It is very generous in you to say that, Richard. But it will make no difference in my arrangements for you; you will have a son's portion, at all events."

"My dear uncle, as you have kindly allowed me to call you—I cannot forget that you are Janey's uncle—not mine—you have already done more for me than I had any right to expect. You have educated me, giving me every advantage that your own son would have had."

Now if, with these broad shoulders of mine, I cannot push my way in the world, I must be made of very poor material."

Mr. Cameron looked with fatherly pride and affection into the face, glowing with manliness and conscious strength.

"No one would think that to look at you; even if they did not know you as well as I do. And that reminds me. How does your wooing progress with Miss Weston?"

"To be quite frank, it hasn't commenced yet. I tell you what it is, uncle, I mean to marry a poor girl."

"But not one of low family, Dick; I should be very sorry to have you do that. The girl, herself, may be all right, but the associations and influences that surround her will be sure to work you evil. To this I owe my desolate life, so full of pain and sorrow. I pray that you may never make so great, so sad a mistake. Now, my dear boy, I am sorry to deprive you of the pleasure of your projected tour; but you shall not lose it altogether; I will take care of that. While any doubt rests upon my mind in regard to the matter mentioned in this letter I could not rest. It has been a long time on the way, as you will see by the date. So we will take passage by the first steamer."

They had a short and pleasant passage; landing in New York nine days later.

Mr. Cameron scarcely waited for needful rest or refreshment, but started immediately for Edgecombe, from which the letter was mailed, that had affected him so strangely.

Richard accompanied him. Though his heart impelled him so strongly in another direction, he would not let him go alone.

His heart was full of pity, as he saw how restless and excited his uncle grew as they neared the place of their destination. He had had so many anonymous letters on the same subject, that he had no thought that it would settle the doubts that so tortured him, and he dreaded the effects of every fresh disappointment on one whose life had been full of so many such.

On leaving the depot, they struck out across on open field, and following the directions given them there, soon found themselves in front of the small, low cottage, to which we introduced the reader at the commencement of our story.

It had lost much of the neat, trim appearance it had then; the gate was broken and the vines dismantled from the rustic porch.

A man was splitting wood just outside.

"Does Barbara Worth live here?" inquired Mr. Cameron.

The man looked puzzled.

"Is it blind Barby, ye mane?"

"Yes, she was blind, and her name is Barbara."

"Sorra a bit does she live here now, at all, at all! I heard say that she was out of her head, like, an' Miss Sutton tuck her to some doctor's place, or ruther."

"Sutton! Sutton!" repeated Mr. Cameron, in an excited tone and manner, "what Sutton? Was her Christian name Lucia?"

"I'm thinkin' that was her name, sur. I only knew her as the leddy that lives in the big white house on the hill—or did live there."

"Where is she?"

"That I couldn't tell you, sur," said the man, with a solemn shake of the head; "she's dead."

Richard smiled at this non-committal reply, while Mr. Cameron looked as though he was uncertain what to do next.

"If this woman was Lucia Sutton," he said to his nephew, "she is the person I have been trying to find so many years, and who I am now more convinced than ever was at the bottom of all these troubles. But if she is dead, and Barbara Worth cannot be found, there is nothing to be done, as I see."

A pleasant, intelligent-looking woman, with a baby in her arms, had come out of the house, and stood listening to his conversation.

She now spoke.

"Barney, I don't believe but what Elsie Pringle could tell the gentleman what he wants to know. You know she lived with Mrs. Sutton, and went with her when she took blind Barby to New York."

"Where does this person live?" said Mr. Cameron, turning to the young woman.

"She keeps a variety store in the village, sir. It's on Main street, on the right as you go down. You can't miss it."

Mr. Cameron put some silver in the chubby hands of the baby; then the two retraced their way back to the village.

Going down Main street, they soon came to a little shop, on the door of which was very conspicuously lettered.

"MISS PRINGLE'S FANCY STORE."

On one side of it was a show window, in which were displayed specimens of the various articles sold within.

As they opened the door, the sharp ring of a bell called a woman out from a room in the rear.

It is our old acquaintance Elsie, looking very much the same as when we first met her, with the exception of a slight limp.

She passed round back of the counter, to where her supposed customers stood.

"I wish to see Miss Elsie Pringle."

"That is my name."

"You lived with the late Mrs. Sutton?"

Elsie looked uneasy, scanning more closely than she had hitherto done the countenances of her visitors.

"Well, yes, I lived with her—why?"

"Do you know what became of Barbara Worth, commonly called Blind Barby, who went with Mrs. Sutton to New York last spring?"

The uneasiness so plainly visible in Elsie's face, now changed to fear and distrust.

"No, I don't. I didn't have nothin' to do with her goin'. She seemed sort o' crazy. When we got to New York, she grew worse, an' Mrs. Sutton sent her to some doctor. That's all I know 'bout it. Did you want to buy anything?"

Here Richard said something to his uncle in a low voice, who replied to him in the same tone. Then the latter turned again to Elsie.

"I have something of importance to say to you, and must ask a private interview."

Elsie led the way, with visible reluctance, to a little room back of the shop.

It was evident to Mr. Cameron that she knew more than she was willing to admit, for fear of compromising herself, though in what way was a puzzle to him. It almost seemed as if she was alarmed for her personal safety.

"If there's anything wrong," she commenced, in an agitated voice, "tain't my fault. I waited on Barby and did jest as Mrs. Sutton told me, and if any mischief has been done, I ain't to blame for't."

Mr. Cameron was convinced by Elsie's words and manner that some foul play had been attempted, if not perpetrated; but the first thing to be done was to allay her apprehensions.

"You are not going to be blamed for anything. Nor will you be harmed; unless, indeed, you refuse to give me the information I am sure you possess. On the contrary, if you answer my questions truly and honestly, you shall be liberally rewarded."

Elsie looked wistfully at the bank-note that Mr. Cameron took from his pocket-book, saying: "Of course, I'll tell you anythin' I know, sir."

"Well, then, what was Mrs. Sutton's object in taking Barbara Worth away among strangers?"

"Well, sir, she said she wanted to consult some doctor about her."

"I didn't ask you what she said; I asked you what you believed her object to be? Mrs. Sutton is dead; you surely have no reason to fear her now?"

"I think 'twas because she was afraid she'd tell something; in fact, she told me so."

The uncle and nephew looked at each other.

"She did? Now you tell me you waited on Barbara; was her mind really affected, or was it simply a pretense on Mrs. Sutton's part? Remember that your only safety lies in being perfectly frank."

"Well, sir, there ain't no denyin' but what Barby was out of her head, but I think 'twas somethin' that Mrs. Sutton give her that made her so. I minded that she always had them queer spells after she'd took some of the wine or cordial that Mrs. Sutton kept by her."

"How did it seem to affect her?"

"At first, it made her giddy an' crazy-like; then she grew stupid, an' didn't seem to take no notice of nothin' nor nobody. A good deal of the time I dressed an' undressed her as I would a baby."

"Before Barbara went to New York, did she live quite alone?"

"Yes, sir. She lived in a little cottage out of the village, that belonged to Mrs. Sutton."

"Did you ever know of her having a child with her, a girl?"

"No, sir, only Mrs. Sutton's daughter. She had the care of her, I think, from a baby."

"How old is this daughter?"

"I couldn't tell exactly. I should say she must be eighteen or nineteen; something along there, sir."

"You think this girl is Mrs. Sutton's child?"

"She was always called so. It ain't more'n eight years ago since Mrs. Sutton come to Edgecombe; so her daughter was quite a girl when I first saw her."

Mr. Cameron looked attentively at the speak-

er. If she had any doubts on the subject, or knowledge of facts, beyond what she stated, she was evidently determined to keep them to herself.

"How long has Mrs. Sutton been dead?"

"About six months."

"Where did she die, here?"

"Oh, no, sir, she was killed on the cars last summer. I presume you heard of it; two trains coming together, owin' to some mistake about the time. There was a terrible loss of life. It was a great escape for me. I was sitting beside Mrs. Sutton only a few minutes before; but there was a lady on board on her way to be governess in a family she was acquainted with—Miss Lane, I think her name was—an' she told me to give her my place, so I took a seat on the other side. I hadn't much more'n got comfortably fixed when the trains met. Mrs. Sutton an' this lady were so crushed that if it hadn't been for their dress they couldn't have been told apart, an' the only hurt I had was on my foot."

Mr. Cameron listened very gravely to this.

"It was a terrible death. I knew Mrs. Sutton some years ago, when her fate promised to be very different. Now I want to find this blind woman, Barbara Worth. Where did Mrs. Sutton take her when she left New York?"

"I didn't go with her; I stayed with some relatives I had in the city while she was gone. She told me, when she got back, that she'd left her with a doctor, in some place on the Hudson. 'Twa'n't more'n two weeks after that she was killed."

"Did she leave no letters or papers that could give any clew to this doctor's name and address?"

Elsie glanced at the bank-note, and then at the face of the speaker.

"I don't know; perhaps I might find somethin' of the kind."

"If you can, and will give it to me, I shall not only be greatly obliged, but will give you this fifty-dollar bill."

Elsie looked at the note that was held up to her, as if to make sure of the amount; then rising with alacrity, disappeared behind a curtain at the further end of the room.

She soon reappeared with an empty directed envelope in her hand, which she handed to Mr. Cameron.

It bore this inscription:

"Dr. John Garvin, Poughkeepsie, N. Y."

"This is the doctor's address with whom Barbara Worth was left?"

"Yes, sir."

Rising to his feet, Mr. Cameron put the envelope into his breast-pocket, and the bill in the eager hand held out to receive it.

"We must go directly back to the city, Dick. If we hurry we can catch the train."

CHAPTER XXIII.

RICHARD'S VISIT TO FOREST HILL.

It was night when Mr. Cameron and his nephew got back to the city; and as anxious as the former was to follow up the clew he had received, he was obliged to defer it until another day.

They went to a hotel.

After supper Mr. Cameron went to his room to obtain the much needed rest, but Richard went round to see Hannah.

The reader will remember Hannah Prouty, in whose lodging-house Irva found refuge on her escape.

The good woman was surprised and delighted to see him.

Among the many questions that poured in upon him, she found time to inquire about Irva, who held a warm place in her heart.

"Is she still at your sister's, Mr. Richard? I hav'n't heard nothin' from her or seen any of your folks to inquire."

"I presume she is; there is where I left her. I expect to see her to-morrow. Uncle Charles has some business up the Hudson, and I'm going as far with him as sister Kate's. What shall I tell Miss Lane from you?"

"Give her my love, for one thing. And tell her that she mustn't forget her promise to come an' see me whenever she comes down."

"I will, and I won't forget my promise to bring her, either."

"What nonsense, Mr. Richard. But you always will have your joke."

"It's no joke at all, Hannah," laughed Richard, as he ran down the steps; "When you see her, you'll see me."

Richard was as good as his word; reaching Forest Hill about noon, in the midst of the first snow-storm of the season.

As he rode up to the door, he looked eagerly toward the school-room windows, hoping to catch a glimpse of the form, so often present in his sleeping and waking dreams. But the blinds were closed, and there were no signs of life in that part of the building.

He found Kate all alone, with the exception of the children.

"Janey went back this morning, and as John had some business in the city, he went with her. You must have passed on the way. You spoke about uncle Charles; why didn't he stop with you?"

"He had some business beyond. I presume he will stop on his way back. You know the search he has been making so many years; he thinks he has obtained a clew now that will lead to some definite conclusion."

Kate looked disturbed. She had always entertained hopes that Mr. Cameron would make Richard his heir; loving her brother too well not to feel uneasy at a discovery so likely to prove adverse to his interests.

"What has he discovered? Anything of importance?"

"I don't feel at liberty to state just what it is, even if I understood it fully, in all its bearings. But, however it may result, I hope that it will remove the cruel uncertainty that has tortured so long one of the noblest hearts that ever beat."

During this conversation, Richard had kept his eyes and ears on the alert, thinking that something would be said or occur that would lead to the subject that was uppermost in his thoughts.

He now said:

"By the way, Kate, I called on Hannah when I was in the city. I found the good old body full of lodgers, and as busy and happy as a bee. She sent a message to Miss Lane, that I must not forget to give her."

Kate's countenance underwent a noticeable change.

"Miss Lane, as she called herself, is gone. George Lane came on from the West, and declared that she was not his sister, nor any way related to him!"

Kate was totally unprepared for the effect of these words on her brother.

He started to his feet, confronting her with a look that she never forgot.

"And you sent her away?"

"Of course. You don't think I would keep her after learning the deceit she had practiced? But it was a great surprise to us all. I was never so deceived in any one in my life!"

"In your favorable estimation of her character—and I know from your own lips that it was favorable—you were not deceived in her, Kate."

Kate's face flushed hotly.

"I never thought to hear my brother defend such conduct as this! In my opinion, a young girl that could plan and carry out such a deliberate and systematic deception must be very depraved!"

"It was not her plan, it was mine."

"Yours!"

"Yes, mine. It was my suggestion that she enter your family in the way she did enter it. In fact, I had to exercise all my powers of persuasion to induce her to consent."

"Richard Harrington! if any one else had told me that you would do, or countenance such a thing, I wouldn't have believed it!"

It was a peculiarity of Richard's that he saw a ludicrous side to most everything, and the amazement and horror in his sister's uplifted eyes and hands brought a roguish smile to his lips.

"You see, Kate, you may know a person all your life, and be deceived in him."

"It may seem very funny to you," was the indignant rejoinder, "but to me it is perfectly dreadful!"

"That is very possible; only let your censure fall where it belongs, on me. The sin and folly are mine, and I don't propose to share them with any one."

"It's all very well for you to say that, but it's my belief that she came here for the express purpose of entrapping you into marrying her."

"You were never more mistaken in your life, Kate. If you'll listen to me with any degree of calmness, I will tell you just how the whole thing came about, and all there is to it."

Here Richard related to his sister what the reader already knows.

"It was not my intention to leave you in ignorance of these facts," he said, in conclusion; "as soon as Irva had been with you a few days, and you felt interested in her, as I felt sure you would be, I intended to tell you just as it was.

But, Miss Weston came—and various other things, not necessary to mention now, deterred me. As you know, I was called away very unexpectedly. I left with the intention of writing you about it, after I had been away a few weeks, or else defer it until my return, which I supposed would be in three or four months."

For the first time in her life, Kate was seriously angry with her brother.

"What you tell me makes it no better for her, and much worse for you. What right had you to place in my family a woman, picked up in the street, and of whose character you knew nothing?"

"Kate, answer me this one question: Did you ever see anything amiss in this young lady while she was with you? Was not her conduct, in every respect, gentle, modest, and womanly? You told me, yourself, that the children never behaved so well as they did when under her care and influence."

Kate remembered what she said, and her brother's allusion to it only increased her anger.

"I don't care if I did! It was a contrived plan, on her part, to make you think her a piece of perfection; and it seems she succeeded!"

Here Kate's excitement culminated in a burst of tears.

Richard waited, with all the patience he could muster, until this had passed. Then he said:

"I sent her a letter, directed to this place; did she get it?"

"It came on the day she left. I was just on the point of sending it to her, when I heard she was gone."

This was the truth, though not the whole truth, as Kate well knew. In her brother's present mood, she did not dare to let him know how long the letter was in her hands before Irva's departure.

"One question more: Where did she go?"

"I don't know where she went."

"Do you mean to tell me, Kate, that you don't know what direction she took when she left here?"

"John got the impression that she returned to New York. I never inquired where she was going; and I am very glad, now, that I didn't."

Kate looked at her brother in amazement. In all her life, she had never known him to betray so much feeling and excitement as now.

He walked up and down the room for some moments without speaking.

Then, suddenly turning, he confronted her.

"Kate! I love that girl with all the strength of my manhood; I never knew how well until now! I will search the wide world over, but I will find her; and I give you fair warning, if I am so fortunate as to win her affections, that I shall make her my wife!"

In spite of his sister's entreaties, Richard returned to New York on the next train.

In the next *Herald* was the following "personal":

IF IRVA will send her present address to the *Herald* office, she will greatly relieve the anxiety of her

BROTHER RICHARD.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CAMERON'S SEARCH—SURPRISE AND MUTUAL EXPLANATIONS.

We will now follow Mr. Cameron, in his efforts to discover the whereabouts of Barbara Worth.

On reaching Poughkeepsie, he searched the directory for the residence of Dr. John Garvin; and having found it, proceeded to the street and number indicated.

It was a rambling, old-fashioned building, in a thinly-settled part of the city, situated some distance from the road.

It might have worn a pleasanter look at a pleasanter season of the year, but now the bare branches of the few straggling trees that surrounded it, together with the neglected appearance of the garden and out-houses, gave it a very desolate and dreary air.

A red-armed, slatternly-looking servant answered the bell, ushering him into a small room at the rear.

"Is Dr. Garvin at home?"

"He ain't fur off," was the rather ambiguous reply of the girl, who stood staring at him with open eyes and mouth.

"Give him this card; and say that I am waiting to see him."

The girl looked curiously at the little piece of pasteboard in her hand.

"What name shall I tell him, sur?"

"The name is on the card. Hand it to him, and be quick about it," was the response.

The girl disappeared.

Ten, fifteen minutes elapsed.

Mr. Cameron walked impatiently up and

down the floor of the little room that Dr. Garvin dignified by the name of his "private office."

The dust lay thick upon the shelves that lined one side of it, on which were various bottles and jars, most of them empty.

The pen had rusted into the empty inkstand that stood on the pine desk in one corner of the room, and a pile of old newspapers lay in the old rickety chair opposite.

At last the doctor made his appearance.

He had, evidently, been called in from some rough, outdoor labor; his hair and face bearing evidence of being lately combed and washed.

He wore a loose, flashy dressing-gown, whose bright colors contrasted oddly with his soiled linen and coarse, dirty boots.

Assuming a professional air, he took his seat at the desk, making an effort to remove the rusty pen from the inkstand. Failing in this, he drew the folds of his dressing-gown as far as possible over the boots, which still insisted on making themselves visible.

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"About six months ago, more or less, a blind woman was placed under your care, by the name of Barbara Worth?"

A change passed over the doctor's face; its rigid, solemn aspect gave place to a look of curiosity and interest.

"A blind woman was placed under my care about that time, sir, but not by that name."

"No matter; that is her true name. Is she with you still?"

"She is. I suppose you are one of the people she got me to write to?"

"She wrote me a letter some time ago; but I was out of the country, and it was several months in reaching me."

"Well, sir," said the doctor, crossing his legs, and assuming a confidential tone and manner, "that was the most curious circumstance that ever happened to me in all my born days."

"You see, last spring I put my usual advertisement in the paper, as how I'd take a few patients to board; givin' 'em every possible care and attention, as I always do, sir. The fore part of last summer, a lady drives up to the door, as nice and genteel a person as you'd wish to see, sir."

"About how old?" interrupted Mr. Cameron.

"I should say about fifty; though it's hard telling a woman's age, sir. She wasn't any younger, I'll dare swear. Well, she had a blind woman with her, partly insane, as she said, and from her appearance at the time I saw no reason to doubt her word. She told me that she had some very queer notions about herself and others that made her very troublesome, and wanted me to take charge of her. As she promised to pay a good price, and everything seemed fair and square, I consented. So she went away and left her; and if you'll believe me, sir, I haven't seen or heard a word from her since! She paid three months in advance, 'cording to my invariable rule, sir, or I should have sent her to the almshouse long ago. I was tellin' Mrs. Garvin only this morning that I couldn't afford to keep her much longer. I've got a family of my own, sir, and can't afford to lodge and feed other people's for nothin'."

For the last three months poor Barby had made herself very useful by taking care of the doctor's numerous progeny; but Mr. Cameron was in ignorance of this.

"You need have no fears on that score," he said. "If she is the person I think she is, I will assume all responsibilities, not only in regard to the future, but the past."

This assurance produced a very visible effect on the doctor's tone and manner.

"Very liberal of you, indeed, sir," he said, rubbing his hands softly together.

"What was the name of this lady? and what did she call the person she brought here? You say it was not Worth?"

"Well, sir, the lady called herself Smith; and she gave me to understand that the patient she brought was her sister Mary. Mary Smith, that is the name I put upon my books, sir."

Here the doctor reached up, taking down a book from the top of the desk, and opening it.

"Yes, here it is; date and all. As you see, sir."

Mr. Cameron looked over his shoulder and read the following:

"July 15th, 18—"

"Received this day Mary Smith. Blind and insane."

"Board paid, three months in advance, by Mrs. Julia Ann Smith, of New York, to whom all communications are to be addressed."

"Wrote her more than a dozen letters, sir," said the doctor, closing the book and returning it to its place; "but never a word did I get in reply."

"I dare say not," said Mr. Cameron, a little dryly. "The lady who gave that name as her address was killed on the cars, two or three weeks after."

"You don't say so! Well, that accounts for it."

"This blind woman's name is not Smith, but Worth," continued Mr. Cameron.

"That's what she has always insisted on, since she began to get better, sir; but I thought it was only one of her crazy notions."

"What is her condition of mind now?"

"Well, sir, when she first came, she was sort o' stupid, and, at times, wanderin'; but she has been improvin' every week, until now you wouldn't hardly think there was anythin' the matter with her. She tells a queer story about herself; but mayhap its truer than I thought it was. It seems that she told the truth about her name, anyway. For a long time she was continually pestering me and Mrs. Garvin to write to some place in Connecticut. At last I wrote, just to satisfy her, and thinking, perhaps, there might be something in it. But the letter came back 'uncalled for.'"

"What name did she give you?"

The doctor again referred to his book.

"Here it is, sir. 'Miss Irva Sutton, Edgecombe, Connecticut.'"

Mr. Cameron looked at it in silence.

"Now I want to see this blind woman, Barbara Worth. I prefer to do so unannounced, if her mind is strong enough for it to produce no unfavorable result."

"I don't think it will harm her, sir," said the doctor, rising to his feet. "She don't seem to act quite natural yet; but she is noways excitable, only melancholy like. She'll set by the hour and not speak, unless somebody speaks to her. She is in the nursery; it sort o' amuses her to look after the children a bit. Will you see her there, or shall I send for her to come out here?"

"Take me to wherever she is. I wish to see her unannounced, and entirely alone."

Dr. Garvin led the way to a sparsely-furnished, but not uncheerful room.

There, seated by one of the windows, was our old friend, Barbara; looking little as she did when we first saw her.

Her cheeks were thin and bloodless, and her hair perfectly white; while her whole countenance and attitude indicated a sorrow and dejection that touched with pity Mr. Cameron's heart, as he looked at her.

A year-old baby lay sleeping across her knee, and four or five other children were playing about the room.

"Simply mention my name to her, and then leave us," said Mr. Cameron.

Low as this was spoken, it reached Barbara, as could be seen by the sudden turning of the head toward the place where the speaker stood.

Dr. Garvin took the baby from her knee, saying:

"I'll take Arty to his mamma. Here's a gentleman to see you; Mr. Charles Cameron."

At the mention of that name, Barbara arose to her feet, sinking back into her chair again, trembling in every limb.

Mr. Cameron signed the doctor to leave the room, which he did, taking the children with him.

As soon as they were quite alone, Mr. Cameron took a seat in front of her, looking in pity and alarm upon the wreck before him.

"Pray do not agitate yourself so, Mrs. Worth. I am your friend, and would gladly think you mine. I got your letter only about three weeks ago. I was in London at the time. I sailed in the next steamer for this country, and have been searching for you ever since. In fact, I have been searching for you many years. You say, in your letter, that I have a daughter: did you speak truly?"

"When the letter was written you had; but it is a long, long time since I've seen or heard from my pretty nursling. I feel as if I had been in a long and troubled sleep, a sleep from which I had tried to waken many times."

"That is all past now; do not think of it any more. Happier days are dawning for you, for us both. The scheming brain, that has caused us both so much trouble, is powerless to work us any further ill; Lucia Sutton is dead!"

Barbara bowed her head upon her hands.

"Dead? And I have felt so hard, so bitter toward her! God be pitiful to her, and to us all!"

"Now that she has passed beyond all human jurisdiction, we will let her sins and follies rest with her; speaking of them only so far as it may be necessary to straighten out this tangled web of mutual mistakes and misunderstandings. You speak, in your letter, of the disgrace I have brought upon your name. As God lives, your

daughter was my beloved and lawful wife! If I wronged her, it was in persuading her into a secret marriage. But my father, a hard, haughty man, was stricken down with the illness that terminated his life, and I supposed the necessity for concealment would be only for a few months, at the longest."

"And the woman who told Alice that she was your wife, showing papers and letters in confirmation of the truth of her statement?"

"I will tell you. Years before I saw Alice, when I was a mere boy, I was entrapped into marrying a woman, profligate in character, and several years my senior. I lived with her only a few weeks. Though all the usual forms were gone through with, she was not legally my wife, as she had a husband when I married her. I should have gone through the formality of a divorce had I not been desirous of keeping the whole thing from my father, who I knew would never pardon my associating his name with that of such a person."

"I first met Alice at Mrs. Sutton's, with whom she lived as a sort of companion and attendant. You, who knew and loved her, will easily credit the impression she made on me—an impression that deepened with every succeeding interview until I resolved to secure her beyond the possibility of loss. Chance favored me. Mrs. Sutton was called away, leaving Alice in charge of the house. She remained away two or three weeks; and so successfully did I urge my suit that before her return I had persuaded Alice to consent to a secret marriage."

"Mrs. Sutton was the widow of a man I esteemed very highly. After her return, I continued my visits at her house. At last, fearing from her manner that she was misconstruing them, I told her of my marriage to Alice and my reasons for keeping it private for the present, very foolishly, as I now see; I also made a confidante of her in regard to my former marriage—if marriage it could be called."

"From what I have learned since, I know that she considered my marriage to Alice as a great wrong done to herself. But so well did she succeed in concealing her feelings that I never once suspected it. She professed the utmost affection for Alice and sympathy for me, and willingness to aid us to the extent of her power. She gave us every facility for seeing each other, and when, a few months later, I was summoned home by my father's apparent nearness to death, I left my young wife under her care and protection as confidently as I would have left her in yours."

"I found my father very feeble, but much better than when my sister wrote me; his once strong mind so weakened by age and sickness that he could hardly endure to have me out of his sight a moment."

"In this way several weeks passed. One day, as I was wondering why I didn't have a reply to my last letter to Alice, I received one from Mrs. Sutton, saying that my wife had died, after giving birth to a still-born babe—that the sudden appearance of a woman, who claimed to be my wife, had given Alice such a shock that she lived only a few hours after."

"What my feelings were at this intelligence, I will not attempt to describe."

"I started immediately for Lindenville, where Mrs. Sutton then lived, but only to find that my wife's mother had made her appearance, and, claiming the body of her daughter, taken it away. Mrs. Sutton solemnly assured me that she had not the faintest idea whither you had taken it, or even where you lived; and as I knew of no motive that she could have for deceiving me, I placed the fullest reliance on what she told me."

"I left a letter with Mrs. Sutton for you. It contained my full address, together with a strong appeal to you for the babe that my straitened circumstances made me ill able to care for," explained Barbara.

"She never gave it to me."

"I had what purported to be a reply, stating that you could do nothing for it, and advising me to let Mrs. Sutton adopt it, as she had offered to do."

"I wrote you nothing of the kind. In fact, I didn't know, at that time, that the child was living. Far from taking the course you suppose, I should have considered it as a most precious gift, which nothing could have induced me to relinquish. The love and companionship of the child of my lost Alice would have comforted me as nothing else could."

"As it was, I was nearly heart-broken. All the comfort I had was to talk with Mrs. Sutton about my lost darling; she all the time expressing the greatest sympathy for me in my cruel bereavement."

"This, naturally, threw us a great deal together; and finally she startled me by a passionate avowal of her love. I told her that my heart was buried in the grave of Alice, and that I should never marry."

"Finding me proof against all her persuasions and blandishments, she threw off, in a measure, the mask she had worn, making use of this remarkable expression, but which is no puzzle to me now: 'You will have cause to regret, to the last day of your life, that you have twice scorned my love.'"

"But I ascribed it to the excitement under which she seemed to be laboring, and thought no more about it. It was an interruption to our friendship, however; and as I left Lindenville soon after, we never met again."

"My father being now dead, and my only sister married to a man in New York, I disposed of my estate in Maryland, and removed thither."

"About five years later, I was summoned to the death-bed of the abandoned woman with whom my troubles began."

"In an agony of fear and remorse, she disclosed to me the fact that Mrs. Sutton had hired her to come to my wife with the story of my former marriage to her; bringing forward letters and papers to make good her claim. She said, also, that Alice's child, a daughter, was born alive, and was still living, the last she heard from it, two years before. That Mrs. Sutton had taken charge of it, sending it away to nurse to some remote and obscure village, whose name and location she did not know."

"You will readily surmise that I lost no time in going to Lindenville, but only to find that Mrs. Sutton had removed a year before, leaving no clew to her whereabouts."

"I then advertised; offering a liberal reward to any one who would give me any information that would lead to the discovery of the child, or the woman who had stolen her."

"The large amount offered brought me letters from various parts of the country; all of them purporting to have seen or heard of some woman with a child, and under circumstances that led them to conclude it was the one I was seeking. But, though I attended personally to everything that held out the faintest hope of success, it was only to meet with fresh disappointment."

"I had one anonymous letter. The handwriting was evidently disguised, but there were certain peculiarities about it that made me think it was from Mrs. Sutton. It stated that 'I should never find the child I was seeking until to see her living would be far worse than to mourn her dead.'"

"Thanks to my constant and watchful care, she failed to carry out her threat. In spite of her bad teachings and worse example, Irva is a child of which any father might be proud," put in Barbara.

"Irva? that was the name given me by Dr. Garvin; Irva Sutton. Then she went by Mrs. Sutton's name?"

"Yes; every one in Edgecombe supposed Irva to be her own child. Not long after the death of Alice, my sight began to fail me—I think I must have wept it away. This, together with my poverty, left me helpless, and entirely at her mercy. She offered to take care of the child and me, but only on condition that I gave her full control of Irva until she reached the age of womanhood, leaving her to suppose, until then, that she was her own child. I consented, on condition that I should have the care of my granddaughter through her infancy and childhood, and that when she became a woman she would reveal to her the secret of her birth and the relation I sustained to her. She solemnly promised to do this, and I, in turn, promised to leave the revelation to her."

"When Irva was five years old, I became entirely blind. Lovely in form and soul, she was the sole joy and comfort of my lonely heart, and I clung to her with a strength of affection that I had never bestowed upon her mother. And though she never dreamed that I was other than her nurse, she returned my tenderness and devotion with grateful affection."

"As years went on, various things occurred to shake my confidence in Mrs. Sutton's truth; and I began to think that you might not be the hard and evil man she had represented. In an unguarded moment, she had let fall words that made me think she had some feeling of personal ill-will, against you. This, together with Mrs. Sutton's indifference, and, at times, positive aversion to Irva, made me often very uneasy. But, blind and helpless, I could only wait, hoping that she would redeem her promise. When I found that she intended to delay, if not to evade this, I decided to again remind you that

you had a daughter, and her claim upon you.

"As soon as Mrs. Sutton knew of this letter, I was seized with the strange mental affection under which I have labored until the last three months. I must have been very ill when I left Edgcombe, as I had not the slightest recollection of it. Indeed, it was only at intervals that I had any consciousness of what was passing around me. When it fully returned, I found myself here, alone, among strangers."

"When did you see my daughter last?"

"I couldn't tell you. I remember trying to speak to her, and how distressed I was at not being able to do so, but where, or when, I cannot say."

"She was in Edgcombe when you wrote me?"

"Yes; and some weeks after."

"Then she must be there, or in that vicinity. Or if gone away, some one there will know her whereabouts. I shall surely find her. Now the sooner we get away from here the better. This is no place for the mother of Alice. My home, from henceforth, is yours. I am your son, and you must let me care for you as such."

CHAPTER XXV.

RICHARD'S DISCOVERY.

WE will now return to Irva, who has found a safe and pleasant home with the Sisters of St. John.

Sister Melicent was an old schoolmate of Mrs. Sully's, the two having kept up, as far as practicable, the warm and loving intercourse of their early years.

She received Irva very kindly, installing her, in the course of a week, as assistant teacher in the orphanage connected with the institution.

It was considerable of a puzzle to Irva to decide what name to call herself. She felt an aversion to that of Sutton; the one she had assumed she felt she had no right to bear.

"I must have some name," she thought.

She finally concluded to take that of Worth. "Poor Barby would be delighted," she said to herself, with a half-smile that ended in a sigh. "How I do wish I knew where she was, and how it is with her."

Her thoughts often reverted to Richard. Would he miss her on his return and make any effort to find her? Or would absence, new scenes and countries, make him forget her very existence? However that might be, she should never forget him.

Irva always ended by chiding herself for thinking of him at all.

"He was very good to me," she thought; "but he would be good to any one who needed his help or was in trouble."

She had written to Mrs. Sully in regard to her safe arrival and prospects, receiving a very kind reply.

One day she had a line from Janey, notifying her of her return to the city.

One of the sisters gave it to her, saying that the girl that brought it was waiting outside to see her.

It was Ellen, good, faithful Ellen, who had been so kind to her when she was at Mrs. Haverstraw's.

Ellen's delight was very visible—her smiling face being more eloquent than even her tongue.

"Sure, an' it is you, Miss Irva, darlin'." Mrs. Sully—it's with her I'm livin'—told me you was here, but it seemed too good to be true, so it did! Och! but 'twas a long an' weary wait I had at me sister's! an' it's well-nigh distracted I was when I found ye didn't come. In the mornin' I went over to Mrs. Haverstraw's to inquire afther ye. Mrs. Haverstraw stuck to it that you was gone, but I didn't believe her. I thought that there was some deviltry at the bottom of it. So I went to Mrs. Sully, an' told her the whole story. I didn't spare her scamp of a husband, either. What does she do but go an' have a long talk with Mrs. Haverstraw. I don't know what was said on either side, but Mrs. Sully was convinced that you had got away, an' that Mrs. Haverstraw did not know where you was. We both concluded that you had some friends you'd gone to.

"It's often I've thought of ye, but niver a word did I hear, good or bad, till Mrs. Sully come back from visitin' her sister. Thin she told me where you was. An' here ye are, safe an' happy, glory be to God!"

Irva's grateful heart echoed the pious ejaculation of the simple-hearted girl.

"Did Mr. Sully return with his wife?"

"Not he, indeed! I hear she's washed her hands of him intirely. An' it's meself that hope it's true, the blackhearted vil'in!"

"He is a very bad man," responded Irva. "I never want to see him again."

"Niver you fear that, Miss Irva, dear: he

won't dare to trouble ye, while Mrs. Sully your fri'nd, I'll be bound! If there was iver an angel out of heaven she's one! Just see what she's done with Mrs. Haverstraw! If any one had told me that there could be such a change in her I wouldn't have believed it possible; an' it's her work, ivery bit of it. As fur Mrs. Haverstraw, she don't think there's her aquil in the whole world, an' it ain't no wonder, either. I was in the room once when she talked to her; so mild, an' sweet, an' encouragin', it would have melted a heart of stone, that it would! An' now she's got her a place as under nurse in the hospital, where she gives so much satisfaction that the sisters and doctors think she is wonderful."

When Richard reached New York he went directly to his sister Janey's; unfolding to her all his troubles, hopes and fears; to which she listened quietly, without making any comments.

"I believe Kate knows where she's," he said, in conclusion.

"From what she told me, I should judge her to have no knowledge whatever in regard to it."

Richard had not the faintest suspicion that his sister knew where Irva was, but there was something in the tone in which this was spoken that made him turn an inquiring look upon her face.

"My dear Janey, have you the faintest idea as to where, or whither this young lady went when she left Forest Hill?"

"I am confident that she went to New York."

Here the two were interrupted, very much to Janey's relief, who was scrupulous about speaking the exact truth, but who had not decided that it would be prudent to tell her brother all that she knew.

The next day Janey received two letters; one from Mr. Cameron, containing much that the reader already knows, the other from Irva.

The latter was as follows:

"DEAR MRS. SULLY:—I send you the inclosed advertisement that I cut from yesterday's *Herald*, and which I think is from your brother Richard. He was very good to me when I was in great trouble, and though I know that he would have been just as good to any one else, under the same circumstances, I am just as grateful.

"I should like to comply with his request, but as I wish to act with perfect openness, I write to you, asking you to let him know where I now am.

"I have great confidence in you, believing that you will do what is right and for the best.

"Gratefully and sincerely yours,

"IRVA WORTH."

The mingled frankness and simplicity of this called a smile to Janey's lip, while the confidence it indicated went straight to the generous heart.

After a moment's thought, she crossed over to where her brother was sitting and gave it to him.

Richard turned toward his sister a face absolutely radiant with hope and joy.

"God bless you, Janey! You don't know what a weight you have lifted from my heart."

Then glancing at the letter again, to make sure of the address, he seized his hat and turned to the door.

"Stay, Richard!" interposed Janey. "I will not ask whither you are going, for there is no need. But, before you go, I have a question to ask you."

Richard turned back.

"What is it, Janey?"

"Do you intend to marry this girl?"

"If she will marry me, yes."

"I have just had a letter from uncle Charles. From what he writes, it seems very probable that he will find his long-lost child, and which will make quite a change in your prospects. I hope you will take this into consideration before you decide to marry a nameless and portionless girl."

"My dear Janey, you are the last person that I supposed would counsel me to make marriage a mercenary consideration."

Richard was sorry that he said this as soon as the words had passed his lips.

The eyes that Janey turned toward him were full of tears.

"It is enough. Go, my brother. God give you success, and the happiness that has been denied to me!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN CIRCLING ARMS.

"A GENTLEMAN in the reception-room to see Miss Worth."

The sister who gave this message to Irva smiled as she noted the sudden color, whose warmth and brightness had such a transforming influence on that pale, quiet face.

"It is nearly four; you need not return again to-night."

Irva's heart beat fast as she passed down the stairs.

"It must be Richard. Who else could it be?"

Richard was standing in the middle of the room, with his eyes fixed upon the door, as Irva opened it, looking, as she thought, bigger and stronger and handsomer than ever.

"At last!" he cried, his fingers closing strongly over the hand she laid in his, and which seemed well content to be made prisoner.

"I was almost sure it was you!" said Irva, as the two took a seat on the sofa together.

"And you were glad, very glad, I hope? You see what a vain fellow I am, to ask such a question?" he added, with a laugh, never once removing his eyes from the face, whose varying color revealed more than she would willingly have told him.

"How could I help being glad to see one who has been so very kind to me?" faltered Irva, making a faint effort to withdraw her hand, but only succeeding in making it a faster prisoner than before.

"As though *that* was any merit!" said Richard, in a tone tremulous with the feelings that were fast bearing down every barrier before them.

There was a silence, a silence so sweet, so full of warm and tender emotion, that each feared to break the spell that bound them.

Then Richard said:

"Irva, when I learned you had left Kate's, I made up my mind, if I ever found you, that I would never, willingly, lose you again. And when Janey gave me your letter to her, I told her that I was coming here to ask you to be my wife. Now, what shall I tell her that you said?"

The color that rose to the temples suddenly receded, leaving the face paler than Richard had ever seen it before.

"That I love her brother too well to consent to his marrying a poor, nameless girl, like me."

Richard smiled.

"Ah, I forgot to tell you that I am no longer the prospective heir of a rich man; my uncle is likely to find a nearer and dearer claimant for his wealth. And though I am not exactly nameless, I have not much to boast of on that score—my maternal grandfather having been a shoemaker, as perhaps you have heard me mention. I have often had occasion to remind sister Kate of that, to her, rather unwelcome fact. But, grandpa Davis, the shoemaker, was a very intelligent and worthy man; so I hope you won't throw me overboard on *that* account."

Irva could not avoid smiling at this characteristic speech.

Richard continued:

"So you see I have nothing but these arms of mine with which to push my way in the world; but my darling will find them very strong and tender, if she will only trust herself to them."

"What did Janey say, when you told her?" whispered Irva, a few minutes later, from out the circling arms, that were, to her, the dearest refuge in the world.

"When I told her that I was going to ask you to be my wife? She said: 'Go, my brother; God give you success and happiness!' And in giving you to me He has given both!"

"And Kate?"

"Oh! Kate will come out all right. She's got some pretty high notions, but, aside from this, she is one of the kindest human beings. She will love you; I defy her to help it! In fact, I am convinced that it was Miss Weston's influence over her that made her take the stand that she did."

A shadow fell across Irva's face; her gentle heart was not one to bear malice toward any, and in the new happiness that had come to her it had grown very soft and tender.

"Poor Miss Weston!" she sighed. "Do you know, Richard, I really think she loved you?"

"She loved the wealth and position of which she thought me to be the heir, you mean," laughed Richard. "Don't fret your tender heart about *her*; she won't break hers for me, or any man. She has made up her mind to marry a rich husband; and when she learns the change in my prospects, will very easily reconcile herself to her loss."

CHAPTER XXVII.

LOVE'S TEST AND TRIUMPH.

THE next morning Ellen brought Irva a message from Mrs. Sully, inviting her to spend the day with her.

"Is your mistress quite alone?" inquired Irva.

"No, ma'am. Her uncle, Mr. Cameron, came last night, and his mother, a blind lady—Worth, I think they call her."

"A blind lady? and called Worth?" repeated Irva. "I used to know a blind lady by that

name. Did you say she was Mr. Cameron's mother?"

"That's what he calls her. An' oh! miss, it's so beautiful to see how kind and attentive he is to her! An' sech a sweet face as the ould lady has! it does the heart good to look at it!"

"It can't be poor Barby," thought Irva; "for she had no children that I ever heard of."

Then aloud:

"Tell Mrs. Sully that I would rather wait until she has not so many with her."

In the afternoon Janey came in her carriage. She embraced Irva with much affection, calling the smiles and blushes to her face by addressing her by the endearing title of sister.

"God make you as happy as I could wish, sweet sister; happier than that you cannot be!"

Then, seating herself on the sofa beside Irva, she gazed intently into her face, her manner betraying a suppressed emotion that the former had not looked for, much as she knew Janey loved her brother.

"Now, my dear Irva, I want you to tell me about yourself, about your early life, I mean. Believe me, it is no idle curiosity that makes me ask you this."

There was an earnestness in these words that surprised Irva, especially as Janey had hitherto avoided asking any questions concerning her past life. But she immediately proceeded to give a brief statement of her early life, and the peculiar circumstances that surrounded her.

Janey listened very attentively, asking Irva several questions.

When Irva had answered them to the best of her ability, she arose to her feet, saying:

"I have strange and glad news for you, dear child: Barbara Worth, whom you have only known as your nurse, but who sustains a far nearer relation to you, is at my house, waiting to see you."

Starting up, Irva uttered a cry of joy.

"That is glad news, indeed! My dear, kind nurse! I have thought of her so much of late! How is she in health? She was very ill when I saw her last."

"Better, very much better. But I can answer all your questions on the way. She is very impatient to see you. I could only persuade her to let me come alone by promising to bring you to her as quickly as possible."

The two were soon seated in the carriage that was waiting at the door.

A sudden thought struck Irva.

"You said that she sustained a nearer relation to me. What did you mean?"

"That she is your mother's mother, who died in giving you birth. Did you ever think that such a thing might be?"

"I never, never dreamed of it! Why has she kept me in ignorance of it all these years?"

"Because a cloud hung over your birth at that time, and she believed it to be for your best good that you should be considered as Mrs. Sutton's child."

"And this was the secret to which she so often alluded?"

"This is BLIND BARBARA'S SECRET. At least part of it. Irva, I have more to tell you than this. There is some one else waiting to see you, one who has been searching for you many years. You told me once that you thought a father's love must be the dearest and most pleasant thing in the world."

"I know that you have found a dearer, now," added Janey, as a swift flush came to Irva's face. "Still, would it not make you very happy to know that you had a father, a noble, true and honorable man, of whom any daughter might be proud?"

Irva's face was pale with emotion, and her eyes full of tears.

"You need tell me no more. It is he, my father, that has come! I knew I should find him; that he would claim me, some day!"

When Barbara put her trembling arms around her, calling her "her dear daughter's dear child," Irva's feeling found expression in broken words of joy and thanksgiving.

But, when she clung, sobbing, to her father's breast, and heard his voice blessing her in such tones of solemnity and tenderness, she smiled brightly through her tears up into his face, saying:

"I knew I should find you; that you would come to claim me some day!"

A few hours later, Mr. Cameron and his daughter were seated together in the library. They had a long and confidential talk.

"So you have promised to marry Richard?" said the former, who looked ten years younger than when we saw him first. "Now, supposing I should act the part of the cruel parent, and forbid it?"

"I shall obey you, of course," said Irva, demurely, who, by the way, did not seem to be at all alarmed by this threat.

Mr. Cameron's face suddenly grew grave.

"Do you love him, my child?"

"I do. I don't know when my love commenced—I think it must have been that terrible night, when he came so nobly to my rescue—but this I know, that it will end only with me!"

Mr. Cameron laid his hand softly upon the head that was resting against his shoulder.

"Richard has a noble heart; I never knew him to be guilty of a dishonorable action in my life. But he who wins my new-found treasure from me must prove himself worthy of her. If he stands the test to which I shall subject him, well and good. We shall see."

A few minutes later a step was heard in the hall beyond, followed by the sound of Richard's voice speaking to one of the servants.

Mr. Cameron stepped out from the bay-window where he and Irva were sitting.

"Stay here, my daughter," he said, drawing the curtain so closely that she was hidden from sight.

Hearing Mr. Cameron's voice, Richard came in, grasping him warmly by the hand.

"My dear uncle! Janey has been telling me of your good fortune. I congratulate you with my whole heart!"

"Thank you, Dick; I am a happier man than I ever expected to be in this life. The daughter I have found is all that the fondest father's heart could wish. But you shall not be any poorer for it, my dear boy; you can't be my heir, but you shall marry my heiress. I have it all planned."

"You are very good, uncle," laughed Richard; "but there is quite a serious impediment to that arrangement. The fact is, my heart is no longer at my own disposal."

"Nonsense, Dick! I've heard all about that. But you won't be so foolish as to prefer a poor nameless girl to my daughter and heiress, and who is, withal, as fair and sweet as mortal woman well can be?"

"You will find me just so foolish, uncle," was the grave response. "I love my betrothed wife; and poor and nameless as she is, I prefer her to a queen upon her throne!"

Irva could keep quiet no longer. Stealing out from her hiding-place, she laid her hand on her father's arm.

"You sha'n't torment Richard any longer, papa; I won't have it!"

"You won't have it?" repeated Mr. Cameron, with a quizzical smile. "Upon my word! that's a nice way to speak to your father, miss!"

Then turning to Richard, who stood looking from one to the other, in speechless amazement, he said in a voice broken and tremulous with emotion:

"Take her, my dear boy, the best and dearest gift that I have to bestow. God make you worthy of each other!"

There is little more to tell.

Stephen Sully's reckless course was cut short by a violent death, being killed in some drunken quarrel; his death a relief to all connected with him.

Janey divides her time between Irva and her sister Kate, and is growing strong and well in the peace and happiness that are now hers.

Mr. Cameron and Barbara are living with Richard and Irva in their beautiful and pleasant home.

Ellen is there also; having been installed nurse to the baby girl that has lately arrived, and which grandpapa Cameron thinks is the most wonderful child that ever existed.

And here we leave them.

THE END.

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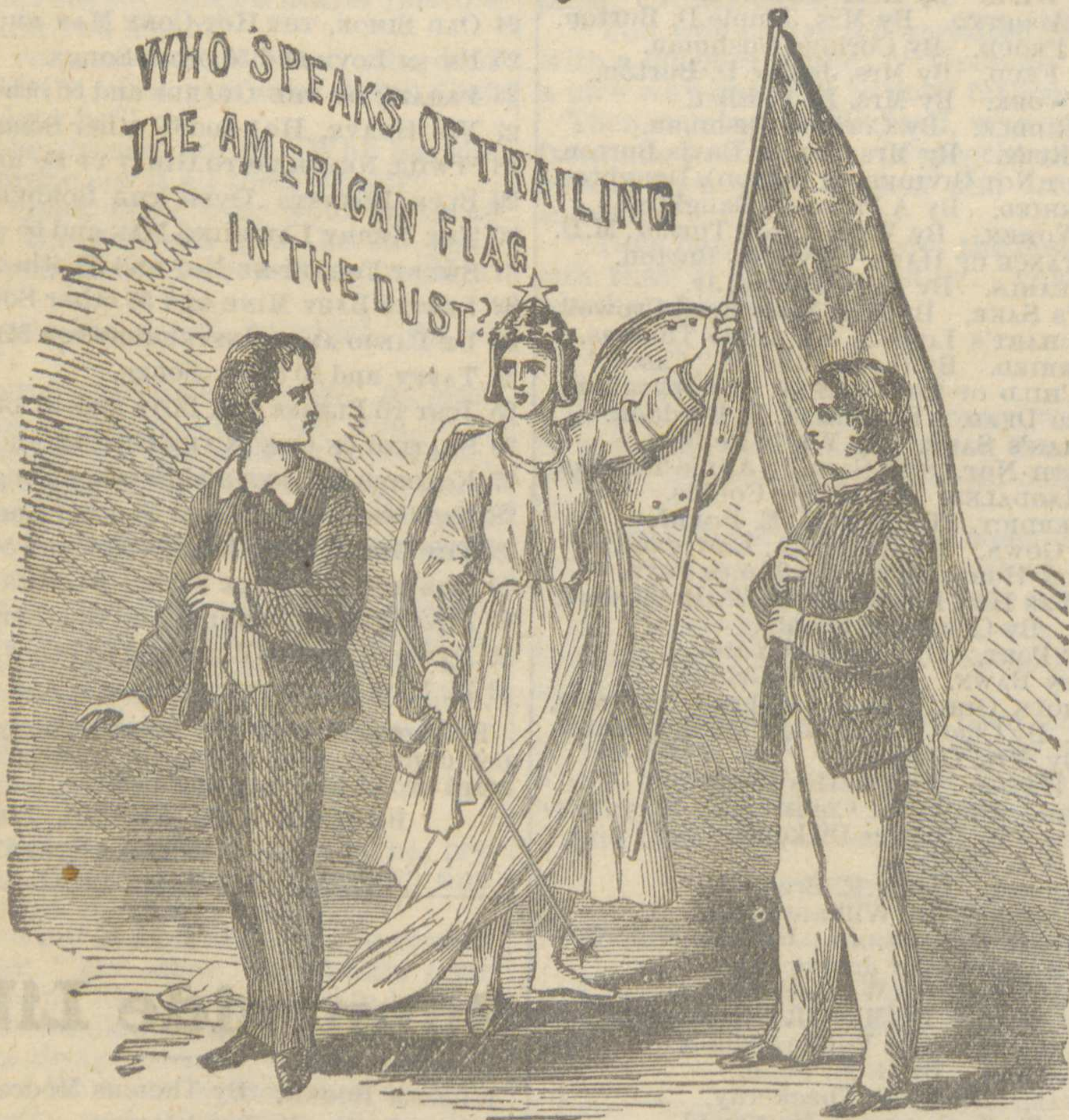
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Lay of the Henpecked,
Lot Skinner's Elegy,
Matrimony,
Nothing to Do,
Old Caudle's Umbrella,
Old Grimes's Son,
Paddle Your Own Canoe,
Parody on "Araby's
Daughter,"

Poetry Run Mad,
Right Names,
Scientific Lectures,
The Ager,
The Cockney,
The Codfish,
Fate of Sergeant Thin,
The Features' Quarrel,
Hammerican Voodchuck,
The Harp of a Thousand
Strings,
The Last of the Sarpints,
The March to Moscow,
The Mysterious Guest,
The Pump,
The Sea-Serpent,
The Secret,
The Shoemaker,
The Useful Doctor,
The Waterfall,
To the Bachelors' Union
League,
United States Presidents,
Vagaries of Popping the
Question,
What I Wouldn't Be,
Yankee Doodle Aladdin,
Ze Moskeetare,
1933.

The Neck,
Foggy Thoughts,
The Ladies' Man,
Life,
The Idler,
The Unbeliever,
The Two Lives,
The True Scholar,
Judges not Infallible,
Fanaticism,
Instability of Successful
Agriculture, [Crime,
Ireland,
The People Always Con-
Music of Labor, [quer,
Prussia and Austria,
Wishing,

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The Purse and the Sword
My Country,
True Moral Courage,
What is War?
Butter,
My Deborah Lee,
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A Mixture,
Plea for Skates,
Playing Ball,
Ah, Why,
Live for Something,
Lay of the Hen-Pecked,
The Outside Dog,
Wolf and Lamb,
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Repentance,
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Humbug Patriotism,
Night After Christmas,
Short Legs,
Shrimps on Amusements,

How the Raven Became
Black,
A Mother's Work,
The Same,
Who Rules,
A Sheep Story,
A Little Correspondent,
One Good Turn Deserves
My Dream, [Another,
Rain,
I'll Never Use Tobacco,
A Mosaic,
The Old Bachelor,
Prayer to Light,
Little Jim,
Angelina's Lament,
Johnny Shrimps on Boots
Mercy,
Choice of Hours,
Poor Richard's Sayings,
Who Killed Tom Roper,
Nothing to Do,
Honesty Best Policy,
Heaven,
Ho for the Fields,
Fashion on the Brain,
On Shanghais,
A Smile,
Casablanca,
Homoeopathic Soup,
Nose and Eyes,
Malt, [Come,
A Hundred Years to
The Madman and his
Little Sermons, [Razor,
Snuffles on Electricity,
The Two Cradles,
The Ocean Storm,
Do Thy Little—Do it Well
Little Puss,
Base-Ball, [Fever,
Prescription for Spring

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Woman's Claims,
Authors of our Liberty,
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Italy,
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Nature and Nature's God
The Modern Good, [Sun,
Ossian's Address to the
Independence Bell—1777,

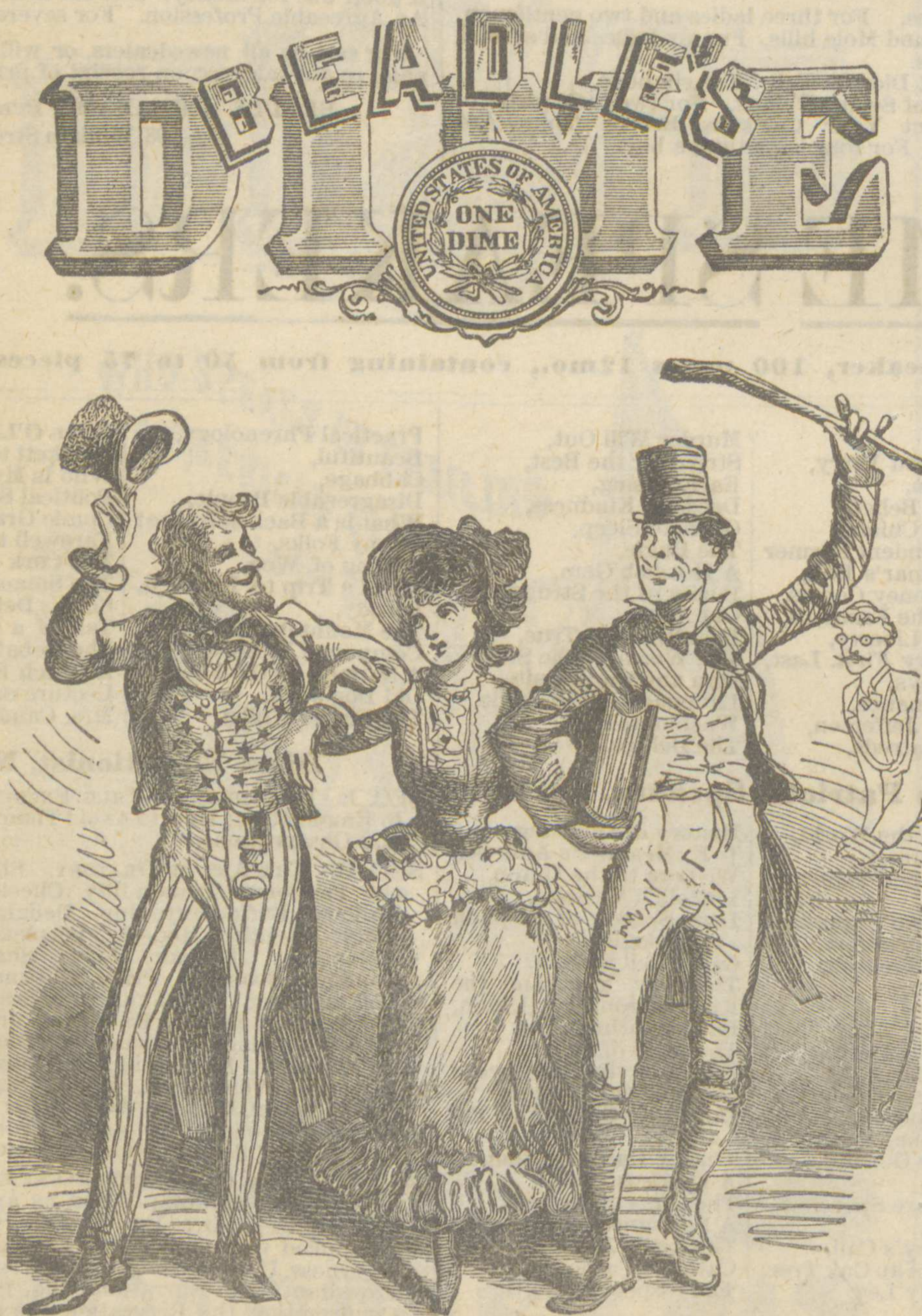
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Miss Prude's Tea-Party,
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Little Jerry, the Miller,

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All for a Nomination,
Old Ocean, [Sea,
The Sea, the Sea, the open
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Stay Where You Belong,
Life's What You Make It,
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Speech from Conscience,
Man's Relation to Society
The Limits to Happiness,
Good-nature a Blessing,
Sermon from Hard-shell
Tail-enders, [Baptist,
The Value of Money,
Meteoric Disquisition,
Be Sure You are Right,
Be of Good Cheer,
Crabbed Folks, [Shrew,
Taming a Masculine
Farmers, [Our Country,
The True Greatness of

New England and Union,
The Unseen Battlefield,
Plea for the Republic,
America, [Fallacy,
"Right of Secession" a
Life's Sunset,
Human Nature,
Lawyers,
Wrongs of the Indians,
Appeal in behalf of Am.
Miseries of War, [Liberty,
A Lay Sermon,
A Dream,
Astronomical, [zens,
Duties of American Citi-
The Man,
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cal Success,
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Summary.
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Assemblies,
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Order of Business and
Proceedings, How it
can be Treated,
The "Question." How to
be Considered,
Rights to the Floor,
Rights of a Speaker as
Against the Chair,
Calling Yeas and Nays,
Interrupting a Vote,
Organization of Delibera-
tive Bodies, Conven-
tions, Annual or Gen-
eral Assemblies.

Preliminary Organization
Permanent Organization,
The Order of Business,
Considering Reports, Pa-
pers, etc.,
Of Subsidiary Motions,
The Due Order of Con-
sidering Questions,
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- 134 **Did He Love Her?** By Bartley T. Campbell.
- 135 **Sinned Against.** By Lillian Lovejoy.
- 136 **Was She His Wife?** By Mrs. Mary Reed Crowell.
- 137 **The Village on the Cliff.** By Miss Thackeray.
- 138 **Poor Valeria!** or, The Broken Troth. By Margaret Blount.
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